

RALPH NADER RADIO HOUR EP 381 TRANSCRIPT

Steve Skrovan: Welcome to the *Ralph Nader Rader Hour*. My name is Steve Skrovan along with my cohost, David Feldman. Hello, David?

David Feldman: Hello, good morning.

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

Ralph Nader: Hello. We have a very good invitation for our listeners.

Steve Skrovan: Yeah, I want to talk to you about that, Ralph. There's a—you know, we've invited our listeners to write to their congresspeople and it appears that they're not getting a lot of traction and not getting a lot of response. And we want to see if we can pool our efforts. And in that vein, you wanted to start a club. Tell us about that, Ralph.

Ralph Nader: Yeah. This is an informal Congress Club which we have an application form for our listeners who are really serious and are willing to spend a few hours a month to do what individually they haven't been able to do, which is to get their [US] senators and [US] representatives to respond to voters back home who want them to take a stand on corporate crime and restoring taxes on the super-rich and the global tax corporations who've learned how to escape paying, not just their fair share of taxes; some of them don't pay any federal income tax at all, or 2%-3%.

So the way it's going to work, Steve and David, is there'll be an application form on our website, nader.org, and people can fill it out, just simple questions. We are not going to initiate this club until the first 100 people join from around the country. We want to show people that once you force members of [US] Congress to take a stand--are you going to be soft on corporate crime? are you going to let the rich and the corporate escape taxation and not be able to fund all the human and material infrastructure that's streaming out? And fund it so it isn't a greater deficit on our children and grandchildren. We can force them to take stands that the press doesn't ask them—these letters' substance. And the letters are very, very acutely written. So they can't just send you back a form letter.

A form letter means that they're rejecting the kind of changes and reforms you're proposing that are long overdue and supported by a vast majority of the American people--conservative, liberal, and the polls, again, have said, people want the super-rich and the big corporations to pay taxes like other people do. And they want a law and order crack down on corporate crime against consumers, workers, communities, all with the way they rip off the federal government, you know, in healthcare, military contracting, etc. So you'll be able to read, listeners, the two letters and fill out the form. And in order to give our listeners confidence that this is going to work, it doesn't start until the first 100 applications are turned in.

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Steve Skrovan: All right. Very good. So we will put a button on the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour* website that will direct you to probably nader.org. And then you click on Write Congress and that's where the application will be to fill out. When we get to 100, then we'll really start the work in earnest.

Ralph Nader: Right. Because once you get a response one way or another from your two senators and representatives, then you'll send us these responses, and the citizen groups in Washington[, D.C.], who don't have the leverage that you do because you're back home and you can increase your numbers and demands, we'll put those answers to work. And we'll see who the allies are, get congressional hearings, get mass media on it, and get things moving. So it's in your hands, as I've said again and again, and it's your Congress, people. Remember that. You've given them the sovereign power and you can demand that they use it in your public interest, not in the interest of 1,500 giant corporations.

Steve Skrovan: All right, very good. That's what we'll do. We'll put that button on the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour* website, and we'll start taking applications for the club. We have a great show for you today as usual and we're going to start by talking about the Democratic Party. The Democratic Party seems to have a knack for keeping its grassroots movements at arm's length. The Republican Party pays attention to its activists, it seems. When the right gets mad, the party embraces that outrage and they're rewarded with electoral gains. Why haven't the Democrats been able to harness the enthusiasm of their young activists? The left isn't any less passionate than the far right. The left isn't any less organized than the far right. The left doesn't like brain power or manpower or charismatic candidates. So what are the Democrats has done with that talent and enthusiasm? Well, not much. What are they doing wrong?

That's what we'll be asking our first guest, Professor Dana Fisher, whose book *Activism, Inc. [How the Outsourcing of Grassroots Campaigns is Strangling Progressive Politics in America]* studied how young activists on the left have been discouraged from breaking through the party infrastructure. Her latest book, *American Resistance: From the Women's March to the Blue Wave*, explores the explosion of mobilizing on the left that followed Donald Trump's 2016 victory. Has the Democratic Party learned anything in between? What has the Democratic Party establishment done with that energy?

That's the first half of the show. In the second half of the show, we're going to talk about trucking safety. Commercial trucks are big, they're heavy, they're fast. They're more difficult to control than passenger cars. And their drivers are often overworked, fatigued and pressured to prioritize productivity over safety. Our second guest, Jennifer Tierney, is an advocate for the Truck Safety Coalition. She'll be joining us to share some updates on her work pushing for stronger regulations that would reduce the number of injuries and fatalities caused by truck related crashes. As always, we'll take a break in between to check in with our corporate crime reporter, Russell Mokhiber. But first, why haven't the Democrats been able to harness the enthusiasm of their most energetic members, David?

David Feldman: Dana Fisher is a Professor of Sociology at the University of Maryland. Her books include *American Resistance* and *Activism, Inc.: How the Outsourcing of Grassroots*

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Campaigns is Strangling Progressive Politics in America. Welcome to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*, Professor Dana Fisher.

Dana Fisher: Thanks so much, David.

Ralph Nader: Yeah. Welcome, Dana. I first met Dana when she was a student at Princeton University and she's never stopped being a student and scholar on democratic movements, small d. In your book, *Activism Inc.*, you focused on the problems that progressive citizen groups, especially the national citizen groups, have been having because they were increasing outsourcing their fundraising and other activities to professional consulting groups. And these groups didn't take this book that kindly. But I thought you made a very powerful point. And to this day, when I get letters from the various progressive groups, I can tell right away they're written by consultants. They're very scripted. They don't have the emotional urgency that a letter written by the people in the various groups would have communicated to their members and they're paying a price. You want to describe that whole thesis of yours?

Dana Fisher: Sure. Thanks for having me, Ralph. It's great to chat with you. So the basic argument that I talked about in *Activism Inc.*, was I laid out the ways that progressive politics have used outsourcing as a model to increase their base on the one hand, but decrease the engagement of everyday citizens into activism and progressive politics. Because basically everyday citizens were turned into basically financiers, and they just wrote checks; maybe wrote a letter every once in a while. And that was all that citizens were being expected to do as part of engagement in democracy, which is obviously extremely problematic. And I talk about how this outsourcing didn't just disentangle or disconnect citizens themselves from the act of engaging in politics, but it also had a really unintended negative consequence on the young people who were doing the activism as we define it here, which is basically doing this kind of fundraising and membership engagement, because they were used and treated very much as replaceable cogs in this system of activism on the left. And it was extremely problematic as I documented in the book.

Ralph Nader: Well, clearly, one of the prices that these groups pay is they don't have well-organized people back home to put the pressure on the federal government that they are urging them to. And the big environmental groups, for example, like NRDC [Natural Resources Defense Council] and the Environmental Defense [Fund] and others, you know, they can do a lot of litigation. They can have their own people lobbying in Washington, but they really can't call on a powerful group the way the NRA [National Rifle Association] does or APAC does back home. Lois Gibbs, on the other hand, who runs a group opposed to toxic contamination in communities, does have grassroots efforts, but she doesn't have a huge budget, but she gets a lot done with say a million dollar a year budget or so. Public Citizen's letters are written by consultants. Common Cause's letters are written by consultants. You know, they are very smooth and persuasive and it is a pain in the neck to have to write these letters if you're engaged in action by these groups. So it's just easier to farm it out. But as a result, members of Congress know full well that while the arguments of these groups are persuasive and the occasional meetings with these groups' representatives are persuasive, there isn't that much power back home. And even though your book came out years ago, in my experience, it's just getting worse.

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I mean, there's more and more bureaucracy farming it out, commodifying the process. And how do you see a way out here?

Dana Fisher: Well, I mean, I would just start by saying that I think you're absolutely right, Ralph. I think that one of the things that I document in my newer book, *American Resistance*, is the way that activists on the left rose up outside of this democratic infrastructure, which extended to a lot of these civic groups. And that happened in a lot of ways because there was this backlash to obviously Donald Trump being elected president, but also the way that the left was doing politics and this grassroots model that basically was an outsource model. So the left rose up and one thing that's really notable here that I talk about in *American Resistance* is how many new organizations basically were formed to fill this infrastructural void we saw on the left that connected with grassroots people in communities across the country. The problem is that even those groups started to work to focus more online. And I think part of that was exacerbated for sure by the COVID[-19] pandemic. And as a result, people didn't want to meet in person. So even the types of work and engagement that I noted and wrote about in *American Resistance* we see moved online and channeling people online means focusing a lot more on what we call mobilizing, which is, you know, short-term engagement in actions that are not relational and don't involve real human to human contact. And when they don't involve human to human contact, it's a harder to build real local infrastructure. And that's what progressive politics needs right now. So when you asked me what we can do to address these issues, I mean, we see a lot more infrastructure that exists on the ground between campaigns and between elections on the right than we do on the left. And one way to combat that is to build these kind of relational politics that involve humans contacting humans and working together.

Ralph Nader: Yeah. And you know, it translates into the way the two parties, the major parties, the Republican-Democratic Parties operate in election time. For example, it's widely recognized that in the crucial State of Ohio in 2004 when John Kerry was running against George W. Bush of the infamous criminal invasion of Iraq [that] the Democrats brought in outsiders to try to get out the vote. And the Republicans had people in the neighborhoods knocking on doors and trying to get out the vote. And Kerry lost the state by maybe 70,000 votes in a very, very close election. Some people think that there was voter suppression at the end and that Kerry actually was robbed, but that turned the whole election spun because the Electoral College spun the election, reelected Bush and [Dick] Cheney, and they're still doing it. They're still bringing outsiders in.

In Pennsylvania, in the last election, people who were on the ground would tell me the Republicans work with people who live in these areas. They're influential in these areas. And the Democrats who are rolling in campaign money—maybe that was their Achilles heel. If they didn't have that much money; they might have to depend on local people. They brought in professionals, not exactly connecting with people, the pulse of the people, the sense of what's urgent and what they want to hear from their candidates.

Well, the Democrats pulled out Pennsylvania, but it was a pretty close call. I mean, if there was 100,000 votes switch in four close states in November 2020, Trump would have been reelected. So this is very perilous both for the Democratic Party and for the impact of citizen groups. How

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would you characterize just moving from the citizen community, the parties in this effort of grassroots mobilization? What's the situation now?

Dana Fisher: Well, what I would say is that we've seen what I think of as a homogenization of the way that grassroots efforts are run on the left. Some of that is due to digital technologies through the different ways that people use electronic lists, the different ways that you can use technology to mobilize people, to participate in actions where you're no longer mobilizing friends, neighbors, and people who are comembers of local organizations, local PTAs [Parent Teacher Associations]. Instead, basically strangers are getting mobilized to work together. So even when these people are locals, they're locals who don't know one another. And that's a huge problem, which we do not see on the right. Instead, a lot of the infrastructure on the right builds into preexisting social ties that come from guns rights groups. Recently, we can see these anti-critical race groups that are staging protests against school boards across the country, and we're going to probably see a lot more of them. But we see these locally embedded groups that are mobilizing on the right and building on the preexisting infrastructure.

When you start after each election with a clear slate where you leave behind, the Democratic Party leaves behind no lasting infrastructure, no real social connections, no real social ties, and you're starting from scratch, sure, it makes sense to bring in strangers or mobilize whoever signed up for your list, who comes from, you know, maybe even bringing in people from districts nearby, which is something that I've done in recent elections, because I was asked to. But that does not work the same way as friends and neighbors getting involved.

Ralph Nader: Your point is well made. In the races in South Carolina and Kentucky in November 2020, the Democratic candidate for the [US] Senate against Lindsey Graham, Jaime Harrison, who's now head of the Democratic National Committee, and is not returning calls, although he promised to. He had about \$80 million. And what do you do with \$80 million? Well, the consultants to the campaign say, "Put it on television" you know, because they get 15% of the take. So they have a bias to go the television ad game, which irritates people because it's so overwhelming and repeated again day after day, while the Republicans have more of a ground game. They do put TV ads, of course, but they have more of a ground game. And the same in Kentucky. Huge ads for Ms. [Amy] McGrath who was running against [Mitch] McConnell; and she lost big time even though she had about \$70 million. These are unheard of sums, as you know, Dana, for small states like that. They're unheard of sums for big stage too. But when do you think the Democrats are going to learn? They're not going to learn it from the AFL-CIO because they're into the email game too. You know, you ask some of the people, well, what have you done in this issue? And they say, "Well, we've sent up a whole bunch of emails." I said, "Emails?" When was the last time a labor leader addressed a mass labor gathering the way they did in the 30s, 40s, and 50s. They've lost touch and that's why a third of the AFL-CIO workers voted for Trump. And because it was a big block for Trump, it inhibited the AFL-CIO leadership in Washington from really going after Trump. They would tell me they didn't want to alienate the Trump voters. It had that vicious circle. And that occurred at the highest levels of the big national unions as well.

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What do you see being done to turn this around? Because these groups that we're talking about, Dana. We're talking with Dana Fisher, who's a Professor of Sociology at University of Maryland and Director of the Program for Society and the Environment. They're not susceptible to introspection. They don't like to take any commentary, even though it's designed to make them stronger.

Dana Fisher: I know. I mean, this is a huge issue, Ralph, and you and I've had actually conversations about this many times over the years. Unfortunately, the criticism is not well received. And what ends up happening instead is we see these new organizations that emerged to try to fill the void. And obviously when you're dealing with new organizations, you have to start all over with building infrastructure rather than building on preexisting organizations that aren't just mobilizing people, but they're actually engaging them in long-term politics. And that's something we just don't see on the left. And so one of the challenges, and I think one of the problems that we saw in the most recent cycle was the fact that all of these people on the left got a lot of energy and enthusiasm from non-local people, right? So we saw—you mentioned two races where tons of money came in from out of state. And those people basically paid for a bunch of wasted time on TV. And the other question that we really need to ask ourselves is who's watching, you know, TV ads anymore? Because you're only hitting a specific demographic, which is very, very helpful to people on the right, because the voters tend to be older and are more likely to watch TV, particularly certain television stations, as I'm sure you know. But on the left, if you're trying to mobilize young people, you are not investing in TV ads for sure.

Ralph Nader: Well, how about these new groups that are formed in the wake of Bernie Sanders' 2016-2020 efforts, Our Revolution and others that have emerged. Are they doing the grassroots effort or have they been more prone to follow the same outsourcing?

Dana Fisher: No, some of these groups have actually really embedded themselves in communities. Our Revolution has done some of this, but I think the one that comes to mind the most is Sunrise [Movement], which is very much connected with Representative [Alexandria] Ocasio-Cortez. And what we basically see is these groups, you know, Sunrise has hubs all over the country of local folks, mostly young people who have gotten involved. They originally got involved around the issue of climate change, but they have worked on a whole series of issues at this point, including COVID relief, including a Green New Deal, obviously. But they actually have come out and helped people in local communities where they actually are bringing out local people to do that work. And one of the things that I think is really remarkable about the way that Sunrise works is they have these hubs that are locally embedded. Now they're young people who are involved here. And so one of the things I learned from a small study I did around this group is that even when these young people are in the same communities, they do most of their meetings online. So I wanted to go and attend one of the meetings and check it out. And they said that everything's done online, because that's how they do stuff. But what's interesting is they start out online, but then they actually do actions, including, you know, registering voters or helping support COVID relief and making sure people know about getting vaccinated, for example. They do that in local communities and they mobilize local people to do that. And they work with groups that are from the community. So they're not just parachuting in as we've seen other left-leaning groups.

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I would just say, Ralph, I think that here, this really brings us back to this distinction between citizens, who I think are extremely concerned on the left and have become increasingly more engaged as I document in *American Resistance*, but they've been focusing much more on this idea of mobilizing around specific events or a specific issue rather than organizing long term. And as a result, they're not actually continuing to pay attention to and hold their elected officials accountable. If you only mobilize every once in a while around an issue in an election, the elected official is not recognizing that they have to actually pay attention and they're beholden to their constituents. I mean, they know they are to some degree, but if you have these constant reminder from, you know, people who represent more, you know, well-financed interests in certain congressional areas, for example, they're going to get a lot more attention, which is one of the reasons that citizens need to be organized, not just mobilized.

Ralph Nader: You make a good point, Dana. The mobilization has to have a laser point. It can't have all these demonstrations and marches and all the human energy go up into the ether. It's gotta be directed to the various decision makers, whether it's the city council or the state legislature or the Congress. By name, they should carry the banners and the names of the legislators they want to adopt their reforms. And that will really get the attention of the lawmakers. Otherwise it's just like an anonymous march and you're not going all the way to the people who can make the decision that you want made.

Dana Fisher: Yeah. I mean, I think that one of the things I talk about in *American Resistance* is the fact that marching on a Saturday or, you know, on a weekend day in general, ends up leaving out a lot of people who may be working and not able to participate. I've found that the work of these protests is really one about collective identity formation, where people come out and they get to feel like they're not alone. Take, for example, the first Women's March as a great example, or the March for Our Lives that happened more recently. But what happens after that is the part where the organizing comes in. And that's where the people who took time on a weekend to march in the streets have to redirect their energies into actually pushing for social and political change. And that's exactly where they should be targeting elected officials and it shouldn't just be at the national level. It should go all the way down to local communities. Because as we know, all politics is really locally embedded.

Ralph Nader: And there's gotta be a demand for responding by these citizen groups. It's important to even get your legislators to keep having to say no. You invite them to meetings. You invite them to the rallies. Keep having them say no. The more they say no, the more actually they start rethinking their role. You know, like some of these citizen groups start taking it personally. It's interesting. The most powerful lobbies don't have to rely on marches and demonstrations. You don't have Wall Street rely on (marches). They do in-personum lobbying with their senators and representatives--winning, dining, campaign money, offering jobs after they retire, etc. etc. And the same is true for citizen lobbies like APAC and NRA. They don't really have to have marches and demonstrations because they focus laser-like on their senators and representatives, find out who their friends are, who they're beholden to, what they need, etc.

Dana, there's a real need to increase the competence, the vision, the expectation of these citizen groups. And even if they're organized, but also the ones that are ad hoc. They need help. And

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we've got to get over this generation divide because the younger organized people are not connecting with people who've been through it in the 60s and 70s and 80s, and they have a lot of assistance to extend, but not if there's no communication.

Dana Fisher: I absolutely agree. And I also have noted a lot that this change in the way the technology is used by people of different generations as well as the way that they not only connect with one another, but they also aim to connect with their elected officials matters a lot. And so by opening up communication across generations and thinking through the way that it works, there's lots to be learned. I mean, I would just say that, you know, historically, the left has been known for its marches and its peaceful protest, right? I mean, think back to the first Earth Day in 1970, for example. But the question is whether those big protest events translate into activism and engagement long term around specific political issues. Because if they don't, you know, it's just yelling into the void in some ways.

Ralph Nader: Baying at the moon. The 1970 Earth Day had 1,500 events all over the country that were linked to existing proposed legislation and they were definitely responsible for the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act. I mean, they built that grassroots pressure on members of Congress. And it's never happened like that since. I mean, I can't exaggerate the total arrogance and indifference of these entrenched members of Congress, whether they're Republicans or Democrats. There are a few exceptions, of course. But when they come from safe seats or safe states, they're colossally arrogant and they don't like to have town meetings anymore. So they've discovered virtual town meetings. Now they don't even want to do virtual town meetings.

We have almost 200 people in the Western district in Massachusetts, Richard Neal. Richard Neal has been reelected 17 times and he thinks, you know, he doesn't have to worry about the constituents back home as long as he takes credit for some government contracts and grants and press releases. So we had almost 200 people say, "Look, we want to give you our input about tax reform. You're the chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee. We have huge power over you theoretically compared to other citizens in other states that don't have their representative chair of the tax writing House Ways and Means Committee." And he still hasn't responded to their request for a virtual town meeting, even though calls have been made. And these people really know their stuff. You know, they're connected with the Patriotic Millionaires. They've studied about IRS [Internal Revenue Service] deficient budgets. They studied about uncollected corporate taxes. They've studied about getting rid of a lot of the tax loopholes. And so when they do the right thing by the book, you know, contact your member of Congress, this is the experience that they are receiving day after day. And it's happening all over the country. And the press doesn't cover it. The press does not cover inaction. Inaction is action. But when you say to reporters from *the New York Times* or *Post [the Washington]*, you know, Congress hasn't done anything on this, and they haven't done anything on that. They said, "Well, that's not news." Well, of course, it's news! [chuckle]

Dana Fisher: Yeah, no, I completely agree with you, Ralph. And I would just say this is one of the opportunities to take advantage of some of the ways that younger folks who have come up in this era of the internet and of distributed organizing have a lot to contribute here. Because if we just think about the ways that individuals can do what they call bird-dogging of elected officials,

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or basically, you know, using their own personal identity and their personal engagement as activists and get attention by promoting it over, you know, through digital technologies, we can see how valuable it can be. I mean, there was great work done by the Town Hall Project to get a lot of attention to the people who wouldn't hold town hall meetings and wouldn't actually answer questions. And we see most recently, I just was reading about all of these anti-critical race activists who have been coming out who are, you know, right-leaning, who've been coming out to school board meetings across the country and are basically, you know, taking pictures and causing trouble and posting it online and passing it around. And that becomes news once that happens. And there are lots of opportunities to do that. And I have to say that in most cases, younger people who are more comfortable with these technologies are the ones who do the best. We saw some really great work done by folks from Sunrise who are mostly young people. And I think that there are a lot of opportunities to really shine some light on elected officials who aren't actually considering their constituents, who are the ones who elected them.

Ralph Nader: We've been talking with Dana Fisher, Professor of Sociology, University of Maryland and author of the probing book *Activism, Inc.* and a more recent book from Columbia University Press, 2021, called the *American Resistance: From the Women's March to the Blue Wave*.

It's just one thing I want to urge our listeners to do. Okay. Do you want to see for yourself how hard it is to get through and all the automated messages that you have to confront? Just call your senators and representatives. You can call the switchboard: 202-225-3121, 202-225-3121. Just tell them the name of the senator or representative and then watch the merry-go-round and get the sense that we're trying to convey personally by doing that. Steve and David?

Steve Skrovan: Yeah. Professor Fisher, I wanted to ask the question and the big question is why the Democratic Party is not good at long-term organizing. Is it the nature of the issues? Is it money? Is it laziness? What do you think the reason is?

Dana Fisher: Historically, the left and the right garnered power from different places, right? So the right had embedded in it more corporate interests and more corporate resources, which was a built-in constituency. The left had labor and had these issues that became known as public interest issues as Ralph has written about. And as a result, there is more diffused power there. And over time, there has been this expectation that to maintain the diffused power to keep contact with people and keep them engaged. And so there was this push to use an outsourced model to keep people engaged and to keep bringing in resources to fund that engagement. Unfortunately, that basically led as I talk about an *Activism Inc.* to this outsourced model, because it's a really good way of garnering resources, but it's not a really good way of creating power. Because, you know, as we know, as much as money does equal power in some cases, it doesn't equal citizen power when you're talking about diffused interests and diffused strength of citizens.

Ralph Nader: That's a very important point. They use diffused interests. Because corporations have just the opposite. They are unified by the desire for profit and executive compensation, and they have extreme stamina behind that focus laser-like pressure on Congress. Where citizen

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groups come and go. They've got other things on their mind. They're not bonded by that one monomaniacal desire for profit. And it's a very asymmetric impact on Congress that bears more research.

Dana Fisher: I think that's absolutely true. So what we see is these concentrated interests are able to focus, I think Ralph just said it, in a laser-like fashion exactly on specific issues and specific elected officials, because they have a lot of capacity there. And, you know, civic groups don't have that kind of capacity because they're trying to represent, you know, the whole public's interest of course.

Ralph Nader: Yeah. Good example of that is they have more full-time staff obviously than citizen groups, maybe a hundred to one in Washington they outnumber. The drug industry has about 450 full-time lobbyists on Congress. I don't count more than eight full-time civic lobbyists dealing with pharmaceutical issues. So it's not just the power of big money and all the pressures and incentives they can bring to bear on elected officials, but it's also they outnumber the staff enormously and the budgets are not comparable. Well, we're out of time, Dana. Is there anything else you'd like to say to our listeners before we conclude?

Dana Fisher: I would just add here that what I talk about in *Activism Inc.* is absolutely continuing today. We continue to see the outsourcing of progressive politics across a wide range of issues and across the left. And while we did see this American resistance rise up in response to the 2016 election, unfortunately, because of the COVID pandemic, I think a lot of the groups that came out of that period of time have moved so much online that there still is this infrastructural deficit that needs to be filled. And until it is, we're going to see, you know, a constant struggle to move the needle and to get progressive outcomes that all of these people who are involved on the left want. I mean, we can see it right now if you just look at what's happening at the sub-national level with these bills to limit, you know, participation in our elections and to try to stop peaceful protests from happening.

Ralph Nader: Well, thank you very much. We've been talking with Professor Dana Fisher, Professor of Sociology at the University of Maryland, author of the probing book, *Activism, Inc.: How the Outsourcing of Grassroots Campaigns is Strangling Progressive Politics in America.* That came out in 2006, Stanford University Press; still very, very relevant. And her more recent book, just out, *American Resistance: From the Women's March to the Blue Wave.* Thank you very much, Dana.

Dana Fisher: Thank you so much for having me, Ralph.

Steve Skrovan: We've been speaking with Professor Dana Fisher. We will link to her work at ralphnaderradiohour.com. You know, we've all been intimidated by trucks barreling down the highway. Up next, we'll talk to someone who's trying to make those trucks a little less scary for us and for them. But first, let's check in with our corporate crime reporter, Russell Mokhiber.

Russell Mokhiber: From the National Press Building in Washington, DC, this is your *Corporate Crime Reporter* "Morning Minute" for Friday, June 25th, 2021; I'm Russell Mokhiber. There's a

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double standard in U.S. bribery law. Over the past decade, the [US] Supreme Court has narrowly interpreted domestic bribery laws. This weakened application of the federal domestic bribery law [that] now stands in stark contrast to the robust and expansive prosecutions of bribery under the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act [FCPA], which seeks to limit US entities' ability to bribe foreign public officials. The result is that those who seek to improperly influence domestic public officials are often able to engage in behavior that looks and smells like bribery but is not bribery. Similar behavior in the foreign context, however, is punished by the FCPA. That's the take of Stanford University Law School's Anna Mance and Dinsha Mistree in a new law review article titled "The Bribery Double Standard: Leveraging the Foreign-Domestic Divide". For the *Corporate Crime Reporter*, I'm Russell Mokhiber.

Steve Skrovan: Thank you, Russel. Welcome back to the *Ralph Nader Rader Hour*. I'm Steve Skrovan along with David Feldman and Ralph. When Ralph helped pass the seatbelt law in 1966, it was a simple engineering solution to a deadly safety problem. Our next guest is going to tell us about her work advocating for common sense engineering solutions to prevent fatalities involving trucks and on one in particular that's pretty cheap and easy. David?

David Feldman: Jennifer Tierney is a truck safety advocate and serves on the board of Citizens for Reliable and Safe Highways [CRASH]. Welcome to the *Ralph Nader Rader Hour*, Jennifer Tierney.

Jennifer Tierney: Thank you.

Ralph Nader: Jennifer, welcome indeed. I mean, this is not an issue just for people who look in their rear view mirror and see a big truck coming up on them. The crashes involving trucks have been increasing and fatalities have been increasing. And the scene now is in Congress and the Senate is in a fight as to whether they're going to pass engineering safety standards for trucks that are long overdue and whether they're going to include light trucks, and not just the big heavy trucks. Tell us what you think should go through Congress in terms of safety standards enforced by the Department of Transportation.

Jennifer Tierney: Well, I think that what we all would hope for is that we all could put ourselves in a position of thinking about ourselves or a loved one being involved in one of these crashes. And I can assure you that the volunteers, which our organization is made up almost 100% of volunteers, the Truck Safety Coalition, what we hear from members is that prior to this happening to them; you don't give a lot of thought about trucks. They're annoying, but you don't think about it until it happens to you and its deadly crashes are devastating. They kill, they maim, and they're devastating. And unfortunately, I'm having this conversation with you today because rather than Congress seizing on a ready opportunity to seriously reduce the toll of these traffic crashes, they are making decisions that are doing like the opposite. And these are things that could be your loved ones. Nobody thinks it's going to happen to them until it does.

Ralph Nader: And these are way overdue. The trucking lobbies blocked action in Congress. This isn't far out engineering improvements. They're way overdue. Give us some examples like automatic emergency braking.

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Jennifer Tierney: Well, Congress only considers these major surface transportation bills every five years or so. So that's why right now the chance to revamp vital safety improvements cannot be squandered. And one of the ones that was just so shocking to me was automatic emergency braking. It's a very highly effective system. Research by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety [IIHS] concluded that forward collision warning with automatic braking could prevent as much as 50% of front to rear crashes and 56% of front to rear car crashes, and 41% of large truck front to rear crashes. And what they've done is in the largest of the trucks, which are a higher class of trucks, they're promoting the use of automatic emergency braking. But the smaller box trucks that weigh between 10,000 to 26,000 pounds and represent 27% of all fatalities, they've decided not to require it in those trucks. This is shocking to me because these trucks now are on our local streets; they go through our neighborhoods. They're making millions of deliveries. They're picking up garbage. They're delivering supplies. And data shows that each year on average, the United Postal Service delivers 430 million pieces of mail, UPS [United Parcel Service] and FedEx [Corporation] delivers 43 million packages. I can believe that because there's days when my neighborhood looks like a parking lot for FedEx or UPS. I mean, these trucks are all over our neighborhoods where children are playing, our dogs run out, the school buses, people are walking. It's a very dangerous situation. And why would you not require it on those trucks? Not only are they on our interstates, but they are literally where we live. This is very dangerous for all vulnerable road users. And the cost of one of these trucks, say a class six truck, is approximately \$90,000. The cost of automatic emergency braking is like \$300. That's 0.3%. And Congress wants to take a chance on our children; your child throws the ball on the road, runs to get it and they're hit by one of these delivery trucks.

Ralph Nader: It really is. It's pretty shocking.

Jennifer Tierney: It's shocking.

Ralph Nader: Because a lot of the others are very inexpensive as well. I know in a letter that your colleagues sent to Senator [Maria] Cantwell, Senator [Roger] Wicker of the Committee on [Commerce], Science, and Transportation in the US Senate, just recently, June 9, they list improvements like lane departure warning, blind spot detection on all new cars and trucks, mandating advanced impaired driving prevention technology--that's impaired driving, not just including alcohol to end a persistent leading life taker, requiring technology to detect the presence of an unattended vehicle occupant [and] strengthening underride protections. That one goes back to 1966. I remember sitting in a Senate committee with Senator [Warren] Magnuson and they were discussing these horrendous decapitation crashes, where for a variety of reasons a vehicle rear ends a truck because of differential braking, for example. And they go right under the truck and people have been decapitated. And in Europe, they have these underriding protections, but to this day, they haven't really required other than a flimsy one. Can you explain that?

Jennifer Tierney: No. The EU [European Union] also has had automatic braking since 2015. So I haven't figured out why people in the EU's lives are more important to their members of their government than ours are to us. The underride is something that's obviously very near and dear to my heart. That's why I even became involved in this issue. My dad was killed on a side

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underride crash 37 years ago. And I'm still trying to get protection from underride along with others, who've lost, their loved ones have been injured this way. They're catastrophic, horrific crashes, and there are preventable and affordable ways to stop those rear and side underride crashes. Automatic emergency braking is part of it [and] a stronger rear underride guard. And now we have a protocol. It's been tested by IIHS. We have a side underride guard that would prevent people from going under the side of these trucks.

And what people need to realize is when you hit one of those trucks, the safety things in your car that protect you don't work in those kinds of crashes. The only thing between your head and the rear or side of that truck is the windshield. They're horrific crashes and it's industry pressure that keeps Congress from doing the right thing. And they keep succumbing to the pressure from industry to not put these things on there when they're affordable and it's preventable crashes. And until we speak up and fight back, which is what the Truck Safety Coalition does, it's not going to stop. It's beyond my comprehension that Congress does not do things that would save lives. It could be one somebody that they love one day.

Ralph Nader: You know, listeners might be saying, well, why don't they do that? They do it in Europe, put underride protections. Well, one of the reasons is when they unload the trucks, the truck owners, you know, pushing for speed of unloading, don't want to have to take the underride aside. I mean, it's just ridiculous. The kind of supremacy of commercial convenience, a matter of seconds, and human life. As you say, you lost your father. And I think our listeners would like to know how you got into this and what you've been doing. We're talking with Jennifer Tierney of CRASH. That's what the organization is called that David spelled out. And before you talk about how you got into this, give our listeners the website so they can connect and join this fight.

Jennifer Tierney: Okay. The Truck Safety Coalition and CRASH and [Parents Against Tired Truckers] PATT, we have been around for over 30 years now. And the Truck Safety Coalition has made up actually of CRASH, which is Citizens for Reliable and Safe Highways, and also PATT, which is Parents Against Tired Truckers. And we have members of our organization from all over this country and they are people whose lives have been directly affected by a truck crash. We have many, many people that lost loved ones, multiple loved ones, sometimes their whole family to these kinds of crashes. And then we have individuals [who] have lifelong serious injuries that they will never recover from including very serious brain injuries. And so we are a nonprofit. The website is trucksafety.org. It is full of information for people who are just interested in the subject; very much has a lot of information for those who have suffered a loss or an injury through this type of crash. And like I said, we are a nonprofit. We do take donations to help us to continue to do the work that we do. The board of directors of CRASH and PATT both are almost by far majority made up of victims of these crashes and we're all volunteers and it's very near and dear to our heart. And we don't want to stop this fight. We don't understand, you know, why Congress is making decisions that benefit the industry versus saving lives. Because nobody—I never thought this would happen to me. Nobody does. And then it does. And to think that there are people that have it within their capacity to do something, to prevent these crashes, and it's an affordable fix and they don't do it, hurts.

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Ralph Nader: Well, as I understand the legislation, Jennifer, it's S. 1386 [Protecting Roadside First Responders Act]. The trucking industry has conceded some of the changes for the big trucks. Now, the fight is whether the smaller trucks and Congressman Hank Johnson in the House from Georgia is giving your group fits by not coming forward and including smaller trucks. Can you describe that situation?

Jennifer Tierney: Well, I think it's strictly a situation that the industry does not want to require that. And to put in perspective of how important it is, we had a member who lost a loved one in a crash. And when the truck was purchased, it was standard equipment to have automatic emergency braking. But the company buying the truck asked if they would take off that standard equipment to save a little bit of money—just \$300. And this truck was in a crash that killed a child. So this is reality. This isn't just happening, you know, in a far-off place. This is happening here now. When the European Union already has automatic emergency braking, why would you feel that these trucks that represent 27% of fatalities do not need to have automatic emergency braking? And they're promoting it for cars, they're promoting it for large trucks that you're just going to rule out, you know, all these trucks. And it's estimated that by not requiring this on trucks, you are eliminating as many as a half a million trucks per year that will not be required to have this. [That's] half a million trucks per year.

Ralph Nader: Yeah. Let me read it the sentence from this letter, June 9th letter by Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety, Center for Auto Safety, Consumer Federation of America, American Public Health Association, California Coalition for Children's Safety and Health. It's a key sentence, "At a time when many in the US have become accustomed to e-commerce and next-day delivery resulting in small and medium sized commercial motor vehicles frequently driving through neighborhoods, this carve-out to accommodate segments of the trucking industry will imperil children, pedestrians, bicyclists and other vulnerable road users and should be removed. We are attaching a list of the stand-alone safety and consumer protection bills which should be included in the reauthorization legislation." And so we don't have the time to go through each safety standard, but I take it, this letter is on your website, isn't it?

Jennifer Tierney: Yes.

Ralph Nader: You want to give the website again?

Jennifer Tierney: It's trucksafety.org. trucksafety.org.

Ralph Nader: And it has examples of heartrending tragedies, preventable tragedies, half of families wiped out, and as you say, permanent disability—all because of the commercial greed and power of the trucking industry. You would think the insurance industry would be even tougher than it is, but they do have a group with consumers called Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety [that] does good work here in Washington. I wanted to ask you about your own personal entry into this following the loss of your dad, because leaders like you and Mothers Against Drunk Driving and others are really a very powerful force, because they never have to be motivated. They're already motivated by their tragedy and their determination to make sure it

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doesn't happen to other people. You've been all over the country. You've been testifying. Give us an idea of your actions.

Jennifer Tierney: Well, when my dad died 1983, I was just—this was a man that had never had a ticket and never been involved in a wreck, and it was just so shocking that he would die that way. A truck driver had taken the truck home for him at work. It was a rural country road. He was backing it into a field beside his house at night. And so he was in a jackknife position in a curve. My dad came around the curve, hit the side of the trailer, went all the way under it and came out 41 feet on the other side. He lived for about 20 minutes, but he had such massive head injuries [that] they could not get an airway established because of all the crushed bones in his face and neck.

And we were just stunned that the driver did that. We were stunned that he was only required to have these three little lights that were not working. And so this started me off on a path that like how could he make that maneuver and it not be illegal? How did this happen? And why are there the only these three little lights and why were his lights not working? But one of the things that I did do that that took quite a while to do, but we did get it accomplished, was reflective tape. Myself working with CRASH is why we have reflective tape right now, because that was one of the things that we knew would help with regards to the visibility of trucks at night or at dusk, and it's constant acuity was a large part of that. So we got that passed. And at the time, because my dad's been dead for so long, we didn't have a lot of technology about underride guards. We had a rear guard that was the first federal standard in 1953. Then when the actress Jane Mansfield was killed in 1967, they did a little bit more of an upgrade and they've done some upgrades. But the last one they did, the guard is woefully inadequate. So people are still hitting the rear and going under them. Well, IIHS tested a rear underride guard that could perform like it's supposed to where the passenger compartment of the vehicle was not invaded by the back of it truck. So that was like a really big step in underride and preventing rear underride. And then the next step that happened, and IIHS tested a side underride guard at their facility in Virginia, and the side underride guard performed like it was supposed to, that would stop cars from going under the side of these trucks. These are crashes that are incredibly hard to survive because of the nature of the passenger compartment being invaded by the trailer. And so that's what got me started. But in doing this, I also recognized there were a lot of things that were wrong that needed to be fixed besides underride. And so it led me down a path of working on all these issues to promote highway safety with regard to large trucks. The difference in the weight and the size of the truck versus the car makes these catastrophic injuries. And in fact, 96% of fatalities involving two vehicles, a truck and a car, are the passengers in the car. 96% are the passengers in the car. That's pretty horrific numbers and I've been motivated by that.

Ralph Nader: Well, it does seem to be the Congressman Hank Johnson who is on the transportation subcommittee in the House from Georgia is a key person. Now the trucking industry is lobbying him ferociously. And people, do your part; call him up, leave a message. His number's 202-225-1605. That's area code 202, Washington, DC, and it's 225-1605, 225-1605. Leave a message. Regardless whether you're from Georgia or from his district in Decatur, anywhere around the country, these trucks [are] way overdue for regulation. They've been exempted from a lot of standards. There's always been a serious problem with truck braking for

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these giant semis. And this is the opportunity comes along every five years. Please do your part, listeners. Just take a couple minutes off [and] look at the website. And before we conclude, Jennifer, just give that website again.

Jennifer Tierney: It's trucksafety.org. And on there, I would encourage everyone in every state to call your members of Congress and you can link to their phone numbers on our website, trucksafety.org.

Ralph Nader: Thank you very much, Jennifer.

Jennifer Tierney: Thank you.

Ralph Nader: We've been talking with Jennifer Tierney. She is an exceptionally effective civic advocate. Just the kind of people we've been talking about in prior programs, making a difference out of a tragedy involving her dad and making a difference for all of us. And so thank you very much, Jennifer, for this.

Jennifer Tierney: We very much appreciate this opportunity. Everybody, stay safe.

Steve Skrovan: We've been speaking with Jennifer Tierney, board member of Citizens for Reliable and Safe Highways otherwise known as CRASH. We will link to her work at ralphnaderradiohour.com. I want to thank our guests again, Professor Dana Fisher and Jennifer Tierney. For those of you listening on the radio, that's our show. For you, podcasts listeners, stay tuned for some bonus material we call "The Wrap Up". A transcript of this show will appear on the *Ralph Nader Rader Hour* website soon after the episode is posted.

David Feldman: Subscribe to us on our *Ralph Nader Rader Hour* YouTube channel. And for Ralph Nader's weekly column, it's free, go to nader.org. For more from Russell Mokhiber, go to corporatecrimereporter.com.

Steve Skrovan: And go to the *Ralph Nader Rader Hour* website and sign up for the Congress Club where we're going to pool our efforts and get some action from Congress.

David Feldman: Ralph Nader wants you to support Whirlwind Wheelchair. They do great work showing people in the United States and around the world how to build sturdy, economical wheelchairs from local materials. Visit whirlwindwheelchair.org for more information.

Steve Skrovan: And for an independent news source that believes people are more important than corporations, go to populist.com to read or subscribe to *the Progressive Populist*. If you email populist@usa.net or call +1 800-205-7067, they'll send you your first issue for free. That's +1 800-205-7067 for your first free issue of *the Progressive Populist*.

David Feldman: Join us next week on the *Ralph Nader Rader Hour* when we'll welcome back our resident expert on Medicare for All, Dr. John Geyman. Thank you, Ralph.

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Ralph Nader: And thank you, everybody. And I believe Dr. John Geyman is going to renew his offer to anyone who wants to send the book free to their senator or representative. We'll show you how to do it via Dr. John Geyman's wonderful generosity.

[57:52]

[Audio Ends]

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