

RALPH NADER RADIO HOUR EP 387 TRANSCRIPT

Steve Skrovan: It's the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*.

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

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

David Feldman: Hello there, Steve.

Steve Skrovan: And we also have, guess what? The man of the hour, Ralph Nader. Hello, Ralph.

Ralph Nader: Hello. Well, this is going to be on talk radio, this subject, by the expert in the country.

Steve Skrovan: That's right. Our guest today will be the editor and publisher of *Talkers Magazine*, Michael Harrison. He said that "Talk media is collectively the most accurate bellwether of American public opinion in the mass media today." We'll ask Mr. Harrison about how talk radio is holding up against digital media, like podcasts, plus whether the industry is still dominated by corporatist far right voices or are progressive hosts making progress. Then Ralph will answer some more of your listener questions. And as always, somewhere in the middle, we'll check in with our corporate crime reporter, Russell Mokhiber. But first, what is the state of talk radio and the media in the US. David?

David Feldman: Michael Harrison is the publisher and editor of *Talkers* and the host of *The Michael Harrison Interview*. Welcome to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*, Michael Harrison.

Michael Harrison: Great to be here. Thank you, David. Thank you, Steve. And thank you, Ralph. I look forward to this conversation.

Ralph Nader: Yeah, well it's going to be a very special conversation because we would never have anybody so knowledgeable about talk radio. You've been putting out materials on it for decades. And the first question I think a lot of our listeners want you to discuss is why is so much commercial talk radio overwhelmingly dominated by conservative right-wing corporatist, Rush Limbaugh type, Sean Hannity, Levin, Savage--all these people--why are they so dominant? They probably have over 90% of the talk radio audience, compared to liberal talk show hosts, most people don't even know who they [the liberal hosts] are. What's your explanation for that, especially since all these stations, Michael, are using the public airwaves [that] as you know belong to all of us.

Michael Harrison: Well, you know, there is an exaggeration there although it is true [that] there is a segment of the commercial news talk format on the commercial radio dial, not on public radio, but on commercial radio stations that do the format news talk that is dominated by conservatives. So to answer your first question which indicates a lack of fairness, you have to judge radio as the

entire radio dial--public radio, news talk radio, sports talk radio, and shock jocks although they're not shocking anymore, people that do talk shows in the mornings, some classic rock stations--and that's basically the world that we cover. We cover talk media. So when people say why is talk radio dominated by conservatives? I have to give that disclaimer, that explanation, that conservative news talk radio is dominated by conservatives just as if there were a football station. Why do they only talk football? Because they're a football station. But there are other stations that talk about baseball and there are stations that play all kinds of music, but it's the nature of radio formatting today; you target an audience and then you super serve them. And in radio that deals with politics, the conservative element has been a very successful one. It's also one that has tremendous influence and it's also one that has a very high profile. So I just wanted to clarify that, because it's not a matter of fairness or a matter that all of talk radio is dominated by conservatives. There are many, many progressives on radio. There are moderates; there are liberals, and there's public radio. There are a number of public radio networks; you're on one of them. There's urban community talk radio targeted to the Black community and they tend to be more in line with the Democratic Party/progressive politics. And so that's the answer to that.

As to why conservatives have done so well in news talk radio, that's another story. And part of it is because the commercial radio is programmed, the conservative audience is a much more targetable demographic, if you will, than a mass audience or people that call themselves liberal. For years, conservatives walked around feeling disenfranchised, feeling that the entire popular culture, media in general, Hollywood, newspapers, television news networks, etcetera, were biased against them, marginalizing them to the right as radical far right, you know, wingnuts [and] all of that. And so when Rush Limbaugh came around after the repeal of the Fairness Doctrine, and people were able to talk openly about political opinion without worrying about, you know, being censored or censored by the government for not being fair, they galvanized around it. That's one of the reasons. The other reason is, frankly, and you were such a part of the scene for years, Ralph, during the '90s, during the ascent of the modern era of talk radio led by Rush Limbaugh, the Republican Party was very, very supportive and reached out and involved with these talk show hosts, many of whom were more populist at that time than partisan. And they gained a foothold. Whereas the Democrats didn't support talk radio that much. And only a handful of democratic politicians showed up at the party and I don't mean that to be a pun. And those are the basic reasons in answer to your question. I don't want to dominate the entire conversation with that because you could talk for hours about how that happened.

Ralph Nader: Well, tell me the role of advertisers here. Obviously commercial advertisers prefer conservative right-wing radio shows than having radio shows run by people like Jim Hightower who go after corporate crime, fraud and abuse, control of government, seizure of the commons, abusing consumers, [and] all that. You see, that would scare advertisers, so that's got to be it since it's all business, Michael.

Michael Harrison: Yeah, you answered the question in your question. And frankly you've been talking about this for years and you're absolutely correct. For the most part, it's much easier to criticize the government than it is to criticize corporations, because corporations are the major force behind advertising dollars and the government is not really an advertiser. And you've pointed this out. I recently spoke to you on my podcast and you made an excellent case for that as one of the broad strokes reasons why conservative works better on commercial talk radio with their form of controversy and their form of criticism. Now on the other hand, to balance it out, a point should

be made that conservatives have had their problems with corporate America in as much as many of the big companies that advertise in the media in general, have suddenly in the last 5 or 10 years developed an aversion to controversy and there were all these no buy lists--no buy--put out by the agencies to tell their clients and their sponsors and stations, etcetera, not to support talk radio, many of whom are conservatives, because they don't have an appetite anymore for controversy. Many of the big corporations want to be on noncontroversial talk radio. So that's been a problem for the corporatist, conservative talk radio companies.

Ralph Nader: That's a more recent phenomena as you point out. But let me run some interesting vignettes by you, Michael. Jim Hightower, you know, he's a great populist speaker on the stump; he's humorous. He has all the qualifications for talk radio and ABC hired him to do a syndicated show across the country. And it ran for a number of months then they dropped him. And when he asked why, they said you don't have the right voice technically for talk radio. You don't have a good voice for talk radio. How do you respond to that?

Michael Harrison: Hmm, I don't buy that. Jim Hightower is a great communicator. Jim Hightower is a very, very effective radio host, radio guest, speechmaker, resource. I guess they had other reasons. He does have kind of a distinct voice, but there have been far more distinct . . . I won't use the word worst voices; I don't want to say that. There have been far more distinct voices on radio throughout history that have been very successful. I see that as an excuse. I don't buy that as a reason. Now what are their reasons is your follow-up question. Maybe he didn't get ratings. Maybe he stepped on toes. It could be any number of the things that you point out, but I agree with you; I don't buy the fact that it was his voice. That's ridiculous.

Ralph Nader: The second vignette is Thom Hartmann. Now Thom Hartmann is inexhaustible. I mean, like, he has a three-hour radio show plus other media, and then he writes books. He's written 15 books. He's a real scholar. I mean, he has dug up stuff on American corporate history that university scholars have not dug up. And he's putting out one paperback after another that is titled *The Hidden History of Monopolies*, *The Hidden History of [the War on Voting]*, suppression and so forth. So he's extremely well-informed. I mean, there isn't a syndicated talk show host that comes close. And he knows how to talk on talk shows; as you know, it's a particular skill. And he's on three days, three hours a day. And his audience is much smaller-- and he's been on for years-- much smaller than any of the top 10 right-wing talk show hosts.

Michael Harrison: That's actually not true. His audience is one of the biggest audiences. It's not as big as Limbaugh's was or some of the guys that are right near the top like Hannity and Mark Levin, but actually Thom Hartmann is an anomaly. Thom Hartmann is ranked by *Talkers* as one of the top 10 talk show hosts in America on commercial radio. He is also on some public radio stations. He's a hybrid, which makes him even more unusual and certainly more interesting. But Hartmann is the king of progressive talk radio.

Ralph Nader: He may be in the top 10 but the gap between the top 5 and him is very substantial; the drop-off after you get the top 5 or 6, people like Sean Hannity, Savage and others who have bestselling books almost instantly, because they have such a huge following, he doesn't have bestselling books. I know his audience from personal experience, Michael, and I know the lack of feedback compared to being on some of these other shows. And not that I'm on the right-wing shows, but after a while you can sense in terms of feedback and the kinds of addresses we give

and emails and so forth, and he knows that. And he'd be the first to say that he is astonished why he doesn't have a larger audience, and he's not on that many stations either.

Michael Harrison: Well, I mean, it is a free commercial marketplace and it is what it is. [chuckle] You know, when The Beatles were selling top records and Elvis Presley was, why did other people have fewer sales? I mean, that's the nature of . . .

Ralph Nader: It goes to your point on advertising. If I was a corporation advertising, I probably wouldn't want to be on Hartmann's show, because he is one of the most fundamental critics of corporate power over our democracy in modern American history and they don't like it!

Michael Harrison: Well, let's get real. It is a free enterprise system, a free marketplace; you can't have it both ways. If you bite the hand that feeds you, don't play in that game. If you're going to play in the commercial marketplace, don't be anti-commercial.

Ralph Nader: This gets us to a very interesting transition. It may be a commercial marketplace but it's using the public commons. The public airwaves, as you know so well, belongs to the people. The real estate agent is the Federal Communications Commission. Under the 1934 Act, it's supposed to advance the public interest convenience and necessity; those are the legal phrases, which originally was seen as an affirmative, proactive role by the FCC reflected in the Fairness Doctrine [a policy that required the holders of broadcast licenses both to present controversial issues of public importance and to do so in a manner that was honest, equitable, and balanced], the Right of Reply, [the right to defend oneself against public criticism in the same venue where it was published]etc. And those are all gone now under George Herbert Walker Bush and Reagan's influence. And yet this is still the commons; this is public property. So you can say well, we have cruise ships going up and down the Mississippi and it's a marketplace and, you know, some cruise ships are better than others but they're going up and down on public property. So that raises a question that is very rarely treated by talk radio, and that is: Should there be a carve-out? Should [there] be a carve-out where people have their own audience network, which we drafted in legislative form and actually had a hearing years ago by then Congressman Ed Markey and his major committee [Subcommittee on Communication, Media, and Broadband]. And the representatives from the commercial media were at the table on one side and I was at the table with some right-wing people, by the way, who agreed with me [chuckle]. And they said we should have a carve-out. Some of that public airway should go back to the people in a structured manner with studios, local, national, international, and it's more than public radio. Public radio is a corporation; That's not what I'm talking about. I'm talking about a rooted audience network where people begin becoming...you know the whole phrase financial literacy, where they become capable skilled in radio [and] TV at the community level all the way up to the national level. And there are ways to finance it. And one way is to tax the use of the public airwaves by commercial radio stations.

I've often written, when Rush was alive, I'd write him a letter and I'd say how does it feel to be a corporate welfare king? You and your station and company are using the public airwaves free and making a bundle of money and you don't pay a cent 24/7. And someone who has an auto license for a few bucks pays more than the biggest TV station in New York. He really could never figure out what I was saying. I mean, to him it was a prerogative. You know, he was

entitled. And why do we give away our public airwaves? Do you have any views? Shouldn't we get something in return?

Michael Harrison: I have a lot of views and I answered this question with my first answer. My first answer is if you look at the public airwaves in the big picture and not judge it by the one slice of it, that's conservative talk radio, you'll find that it's just about everything reflected on the public airwaves including the aforementioned National Public Radio, Pacifica, American Public Radio, all the public channels; those are on the public airwaves. College radio stations, Black community radio stations, DJs that are really talk show hosts on music stations, most of whom are progressive. The numbers don't stack up that way. And somebody like Limbaugh would make the case that they are the alternative. But that's neither here nor there. Let me take it one step further, Ralph, because emotionally I sympathize with what you're saying. I just have a better grasp of the facts in terms of the big picture from a nonpartisan view. You know I'm not a partisan. I couldn't do what I do if I was partisan. The bigger picture is that it doesn't matter anymore. All the laws about the common grounds and the common airwaves and the public property were at a time when it was a scarce entity, where the only way people could engage in mass communications was on the radio and television airwaves in terms of electronic media.

Today, the electronic media, meaning radio and television, the kind we grew up with, is fighting for its life against a complete wide array of unregulated media, social media, Facebook, Twitter, websites, streaming, YouTube, podcasts. The stations that are carrying Rush Limbaugh's show or did, are fighting for their lives, just like all the other stations at this point in time against exotic, digital media, that ultimately is going to win the battle. So that's the answer.

Ralph Nader: Okay, let me answer the answer. Number one, all these examples you gave, Michael, are top down. I'm interested in developing grassroot media communities that are bottom up; so basically they generate the stories that are never told. And as you know, local journalism is starving now and the local radio, except for a few NPR [National Public Radio] stations, who take their locals seriously. But local radio now is just, you know, syndicated stuff and commercial stuff. They don't cover town hall, town meetings, and so on. And so, I'm looking . . . see, you mentioned Pacifica, you mentioned NPR, you mentioned all these other . . . they're top down. I'm talking about a well-funded through a tax on the commercial use of the airwaves and they're making billions of dollars and paying nothing for the use. We're the landlords, they're the tenants [and] there's no rent.

Michael Harrison: You're repeating yourself Ralph!

Ralph Nader: That's the difference . . . yeah, let me finish. There are two ways I want to respond to enrich this dialogue. One is the bottom up, basically giving people with adequate technical resources, studios, etcetera, the opportunity to become media literate and a very significant newsworthy say. The news business is full of taboos; you know that. Everybody knows that. There are things that are never discussed. And the growth of our civilization is that what was never discussed years ago is now being discussed in the racial, sexual, gender areas. But in the corporate area there are huge taboos, which gets me to the second point. You may be right on the proliferation. I mean, there are all kinds of outlets now, but I'm talking about the content. The content is not proliferating. The content that people should know about, should be alerted about, should be engaged about, should be able to initiate themselves in a kind of an initiatory media

democracy, that is not . . . people would say . . . for example, I was once on a network and the guy lied about me. And I said I want to rebut. It was a clear lie. It wasn't a value judgment. And I said I want to rebut. And he said what do you mean? You got plenty of things to rebut. You can go to Newark and rebut. Get on the station there. But it's not the same audience that heard the lie.

Michael Harrison: I agree.

Ralph Nader: So we're talking content now. And if we had more time, you and I could go through all kinds of subject matter that is not discussed. And I'll pick one that you know a lot about; ESPN and the commercialization of sports, which now involves high school and college and NCAA [National Collegiate Athletic Association] and so-called amateur and professional. We have a group called leaguefans.org and it's run by a very savvy person who was a marketing person and got disgusted. He was a coach; he was an athlete. He's put out great books and it's basically the dark side of sports, you know, the cover-up on the concussions, the substance misuse, the bullying, on and on and on, the lack of physical education in the schools, and it's almost going extinct and increase in sedentary living and obesity among the young and on and on. And, he's written these wonderful books which Robert Lipsyte and others, I mean, really great figures in sports journalism have praised. He can't get on. He can't get on commercial radio. He can't get on commercial television. He can't get on anything. He's on some Canadian station and he has a blog. And he's very, very relevant. Now that's what I mean by "content." You have all kinds of media. But when it comes to sports, it's dominated by commercial sports vested interests. And I listen to ESPN radio. I mean, they can't count the number of hours they have and they're constantly talking about contracts and about this and back and forth. They never talk about the fans--how they're being ripped off, how they're being excluded. The whole scene is dismal, but I'm just picking this one out to give an example of content differentiation.

Michael Harrison: Not to mention if you're talking sports, the current fascination and rush to embrace sports gambling on the sports media.

Ralph Nader: Oh, touché. Can you imagine that?

Michael Harrison: Yes. [laughter]

Ralph Nader: Now you're going to have college, you're going to have college athletes hiring agents and tax advisors and look at all the envy and division with the other players on the same team because this quarterback is raking in money and they aren't.

Michael Harrison: I love what you stand for, Ralph, and I support it from an emotional and a theoretical perspective. What you're talking about is basic intelligence, basic fairness, basic honesty, trying to do a good job, trying to help the public. Unfortunately, in the free market and free enterprise, and when it becomes overly corporate, as I agree with you it has, things are not always done with that in mind. And it's a matter of chasing the numbers, chasing the clicks, chasing the dollars. And that dominates the big-time media. I want to go back--I know we're running short on time--to the grassroots opportunity of local media/local podcasts. I think the death of local newspapers is a terrible problem for our democracy, but it's more a business issue; it's more a revenue issue. Once we figure out how to monetize all media in the digital era, there will be a rise of local news organizations again. But they won't be in paper; they'll be online. And to teach people how to go to studios and operate radio and television is teaching them how to get along in 1950, '60, and '70. We have to teach our children how to operate computers, how to do their own radio

shows, TV shows from home. And grassroots media is going to have a resurgence. There already is from that direction.

And you know, you should be in some ways selfish about this. You're one of the few major radio presences talking about these things. You do talk about this. I have a question for you. Since you're providing this service, and I don't mean this to be nasty or to give you trouble, why isn't your show bigger out there than it is since you are providing the public with this necessary information. How come you don't have a bigger show and more listeners? How come Thom Hartmann isn't on more stations? If they thought it could make money, they would, you know. Have you stopped and thought that maybe there's not as much of an appetite out there for this even though perhaps there should be?

Ralph Nader: Well, there are a lot of reasons for that. One is we don't do celebrities. I mean, when Britney Spears was in the news, even if we could have her on, we wouldn't have her on. So we don't do celebrities. As you know, celebrities grab audiences. That's one reason. The second reason is it requires a lot of concentration to listen to the show, because it's not just soundbites. I mean, you can see just with our dialogue, right? I mean, you couldn't have a dialogue like that even on public radio. I mean, on radio, it's a matter of a few seconds before they interrupt you and ask another question or make a comment. And we let people talk in paragraphs. We let people reflect on the air. And the whole audience in America has been acculturated to fast, quick soundbites, almost sound barks and very quick image changes even on TV news.

Michael Harrison: Tell me about it.

Ralph Nader: Yeah, so it's a bit of a Pavlovian problem here that we're fighting. It's like trying to get kids to eat nutritious food after they've had a huge diet of sugar, salt, and fat. They actually hate the taste.

Michael Harrison: Absolutely. It's a cultural issue. Ralph, it's a cultural issue--a complex cultural issue that goes beyond corporatism versus Thom Hartmann.

Ralph Nader: But on the other hand, the rulers that be, the powers that be, they know what they're doing. I made a major speech on the need for the Clinton administration to make infectious disease and epidemics a top priority. This was on the occasion of the international convention in Philadelphia of infectious disease specialists. I was not invited to speak. I tried to call the White House and I got through. And I said you know, Clinton should ask to speak, because we were concerned with tuberculosis, the drug resistant tuberculosis and other things at that time, as well as what was coming in terms of avian flu from China and so forth. This was in the 1990s, late 1990s. And the press blacked it out completely including talk radio. I mean, it was well advanced.

And what we're seeing here is something that often isn't addressed. I used to get on major talk radio when we had Williams in Boston and Jackson in LA [Los Angeles]; you know all these people. You remember they had large regional audiences, Chicago, KMOX, in St. Louis, and they're all gone now. They were all either replaced by local sweetheart advertising people, or more likely they were replaced by the big syndicates. They were replaced by Sean Hannity and others. And they're all gone. And of course all this important work we're doing here, and there's hardly a major problem and injustice in this country that we have not anticipated in our work over 50 years and documented and pleaded. And so what I'm saying is things are getting worse regardless of the proliferation of news and media outlets. We're getting . . . and I'm saying all our citizen groups

that got through the major legislation for consumer protection, auto safety, environment in the early 1970s--the Air Pollution Control Act, the Water Pollution Control Act, the Product Safety Act, the Environmental Protection Agency, occupational safety--we couldn't have done this without the media. And now, if we were trying to do this now, we wouldn't even get a congressional hearing, Michael.

I'm trying to get even Senator [Richard] Blumenthal, who is the chief supporter of tougher corporate crime enforcement. He has a subcommittee on the Constitution and he's going to have trouble with his chair, [Dick] Durbin, in having corporate crime hearings and we're into our corporate crime wave. If anybody doesn't believe it just read the *Wall Street Journal*, look at *60 Minutes*, *Washington Post*; you know all that. So things are getting worse. How do you address?

Michael Harrison: Well, I think part of it is I think these guys are afraid of you specifically. I think you're seeing a lot of this through your own experience in your own eyes and you don't realize how scary you are to some of these establishment figures whether they're left or right, as they were all corporate. And your attack is on their, you know, the mother's milk [chuckles] of their industry and you ask tough questions. So obviously they avoid you. They also avoid a lot of the commercial broadcasters to including the conservatives. Conservatives complain to me that they have trouble having access as well, so this is a broader problem. And again, you're doing, pardon the expression, God's work, being out there in an area where it's needed obviously.

So I don't want to say, you know, they don't like you or they're afraid of you in a pejorative way. It's actually a tribute to what you're doing. But it's lonely on the frontier, Ralph. It isn't easy turning societies around. It isn't easy questioning and holding power's feet to the fire as you do. It's a battle that will always go on as long as we have this human DNA. This is the way people had been from the beginning of time. I mean, talking to you on this on this subject intelligently takes us into deep philosophy and theory. And again, the broadcast trivia is saying shut up, Harrison, we're coming to the end of the time that you were invited for. But you're taking it down a deep rabbit hole. This is about our culture. This is about human nature. This is about free enterprise. How the hell do you run a country with so many people and so many interests in it and keep everybody happy? I mean, had you been elected president, did you ever stop and think what a headache you would've had trying to make a lot of these visions that you have come true in the real world of Congress, the Supreme Court and all the politics and corporate interests out there? You would have said take me outside and release me of this. You ever think about that, Ralph?

Ralph Nader: Well, the bully pulpit is a different dimension in the White House. There's huge leverage to communicate and mobilize the people against the vested interest. But I want your insight on this. We used to get on *The Phil Donahue Show* on food safety, on auto safety, on environment, on labor. He would have the first advocates for women's liberation, the first advocates for gay rights, the first advocates for abolishing nuclear weapons. He had 10 million viewers. And in between, of course he had a majority of entertainment shows to keep the audience. And he was a great advocate of the First Amendment. I consider him the greatest practitioner and enabler of the First Amendment on controversial issues in the 20th century. Then I would get on Merv Griffin; I would get on Mike Douglas. I would get on all these shows and I wasn't the only one. They're all gone now. I mean, afternoon television is rancid. They have bouncers. They have people accusing each other of cheating. Yeah, you know what it's all about. That's gone . . .

Michael Harrison: Our culture is getting crappier and crappier, if I could use that term.

Ralph Nader: When I asked Phil Donahue that in 1996, I said, "it's declining." The citizen groups who helped build this country's sense of justice and institutions of justice are being shut out, Phil. He said "We're in a culture of decay"--just what you said, Michael.

Michael Harrison: Um-hum, yeah.

Ralph Nader: And so I want your insight on why are things getting worse when we have an internet and we still have the right to demonstrate and petition and march. Why?

Michael Harrison: Why? I guess this is a greater question than I have to . . . it's above my paygrade, Ralph. These are questions that go all the way back to Sodom and Gomorrah, to the flood, when God said, "People are corrupt. Let's get rid of them and start over." Why does society in good times tend to go toward corruption and it takes trouble and bad times, wars, pestilence and death for people to say, okay, maybe it's time to reevaluate our culture and our principles. This is the great human dilemma. So, yeah, I do agree; I said it. Our culture is in some type of decay and do you propose making it against the law to be frivolous and stupid? Is that what you're saying? Should the government step in and tell broadcasters in the free marketplace what they must do? Is government regulation and government's judgment over quality and fairness the answer to corporate misuse of power? I don't think so. I think it's even more dangerous. We're stuck between a rock and a hard place.

Ralph Nader: No, I've always supported the Fairness Doctrine, but that's not much regulation at all. That's just giving different views, different voices.

Michael Harrison: It proved not to work.

Ralph Nader: Don't tell Sean Hannity that. That was a great release for Sean and Rush and all. But there's an alternative and that is . . . look, right now, the commercial media controls that part of the spectrum 24/7. Seven days a week, they decide who says what, who doesn't say what, and they get it free and they don't pay any rent to "we the people." I'm saying, all right, never mind government censorship. We're not talking about that. Just give part of the hours per day back to an audience network and give a good resource by charging rent. You see, I think the usual description of "the people" is they're totally distracted by their family burdens, worries, and the rest of the time is entertainment. And you're not going to get any civic energy out of most of the people.

The other way to look at the people is I think of more compassionate way is that most of them have given up on themselves when it comes to counting and engaging a vigorous productive democracy and society. I think deep inside them they feel they don't count and that's why a lot of them don't vote. They don't count; nobody's listening to them [so] why bother. I'll pursue my hobby. I'll look at my favorite program. I'll play with the kids. I'll go to work and I'll support them [so] don't bother me. They've given up on themselves.

Michael Harrison: They've given up too much.

Ralph Nader: And of course the educational system . . . yeah, the educational system doesn't help because they don't teach civic skills and civic participation in elementary and high school.

Michael Harrison: Bingo. Very important point. We should go back to teaching civics. What we used to call when I was a kid social studies--how a bill becomes a law. Of course it was very naive.

I grew up thinking I could write a letter to my congressman with a great idea, and if he or she liked it, they'd introduce it to the House and it might become a law. That's what I believed as a kid. I later learned that the chances of that happening are somewhere between zero and none.

But the people have to have a certain level of responsibility to be informed. But the reason we have representative government is because people cannot be expected to make it their business to be as informed as necessary when they are busy taking care of their children and keeping the house growing and maintaining their relationships and pleasing their boss and fighting traffic and dealing with pandemics and all the stuff that it takes to be a reasonably reputable human being. The representatives have sold them out; that's the point.

Ralph Nader: Yeah, there's a minimum level of activity people have to have so that their representatives heed them, listen to them, realize where they're coming from. That's what I'm saying.

Michael Harrison: Well, we sound more like preachers than we do teachers or government officials. We're preaching.

Ralph Nader: We're reachers. We reach out, Michael. Let me give you an example. This is a very good show. Let me give an example because I'm into trends, decaying trends--reaffirming, rebuilding, renewing trends. When I was in college I used to read the *Congressional Record* and also I read it and in high school. I found it piled up in a closet in the high school library. And then I figured out I don't want to start digging in a library. I want a subscription. So I wrote to my senator. And the senator said you have a free subscription. You're going to get the *Congressional Record* every day they're in session. And he wrote me a personal letter. In those days, senators had a quota. They could have couple hundred free subscriptions or whatever to people who wanted it/needed, it in addition to the libraries. All the libraries got it.

Well here's the interesting story. I used to correspond as a nobody with senators. I would correspond with Senator Prescott Bush who, as you know, is the grandfather George W. Bush and the father of George Herbert Walker Bush and he was a Connecticut senator. He would respond to me. I would say can you get me the hearings on the senate monopoly, anti-monopoly committee on the auto dealers and the auto companies twisting arms with their franchise agreements? Bingo. I would get the hearings. I would get the hearings. I would talk to my member of Congress. I would be able to get response.

Now listen to this, Michael, to show the decay--we have a letter from one of our listeners that just came in and it's by Fred Glienna. The subject, lack of response from my representatives in Congress. Here's what he said exactly, "I have mailed more than 25 letters since May without yet receiving even one response. My letters have gone to house and senate members, the attorney general, the president and vice-president. I write concise and polite letters. These days the public servants do not bother even with form letters. This is a deplorable situation. Any hints to fix it? This is a widespread subject, I can't get NPR to even talk about it."

Michael Harrison: It is a problem. You're citing examples of a situation that's most troubling. It is a problem. And the answer lies in a long-term solution of changing our priorities educationally and in terms of our national conversation in terms of principles. But in practice, that senator, those congressmen know that writing a letter and getting involved with an individual constituent on that level, because they're intelligent, etcetera, does not have as much weight in their getting re-elected

as snuggling up with big donors or power brokers. And they . . . we're at a period in politics where that's all that matters. Their consultants told them that. The entire paradigm is different. Well maybe it always was this way and you were a 15-year-old or an 18-year-old or a 20-year-old who is such an anomaly that you grew up to be a five-time presidential candidate, a prolific author, a radio broadcaster, and a guy that wrote a book that's considered one of the greatest pieces of journalism of all time [*Unsafe at Any Speed*] that went on to turn around the entire automobile industry. How many kids have that potential? You're viewing the world through your eyes. You are Ralph Nader. You were Ralph Nader probably when you were 10. You were probably asking questions like that. The average kid doesn't think about getting the *Congressional Record* [laughs]. They just aren't that way. And I don't know why I'm telling you that--maybe because I care about you personally, because what you're saying appeals to me emotionally. I think that you're absolutely right. I just don't want you to be frustrated.

Ralph Nader: We're talking with Michael Harrison of *Talkers*. And we're going to talk a bit about *Talkers* in a minute. But see, what I'm pointing out is even the pretense of courtesy by corporations, public relations, customer service, members of Congress, state legislatures; even the pretense of courtesy that is just acknowledging receipt has been tossed out the window. That's how coarse the political and corporate culture have become. But the other point is this--most leaders are members of a tiny number of people in their category. So we don't need large numbers of people reading the *Congressional Record*. We need members of Congress who have the dignity and have the foresight to know that when a youngster writes them, other than please congratulate me, I just graduated from high school, or I got my Eagle Scout ceremony, that could be a great inspiration and it has been throughout history. And they're foregoing that opportunity and they don't even have to pay postage! Since they have the Franking Privilege.

So it's not just me. It's just people . . . there are always one percent of the people who are going to pick up the fight for justice in a more permanent and full-time way and those people should be responded to. And they're the people who begin talking to other people who are more withdrawn. And the more withdrawn talk to other people who are totally withdrawn from civic life and engagement. And that's all very healthy. We can't all spend our time worrying about, you know, nuclear arms control. But we can have small numbers of people generate and put forces in motion, in terms of our political institutions, corporate institutions, local government, you name it. And I'm saying things are getting a lot worse while we're sitting around congratulating ourselves about the new information age and the new internet age and here we come with augmented reality from Facebook with goggles. It's going nuts. We've got to get down to earth.

Michael Harrison: Yes, we do. And old-timers like us have to be very careful not to sound like we're stuck in the past. That's a very fine line also. It's a generational issue. When you talk about things used to be better and they're worse today, you run into agism and you run into that as well. There's a lot of things that have to be overcome to keep us from going down a dark path. Anybody who knows history knows that progress isn't always in a certain direction. Sometimes we go backwards and we have to go around and we have to circle back. We're not always moving forward in terms of forward meaning better. So are we heading into a dark age? I certainly hope not. But there's a case to be made that we might be. And if that's the point then what you're doing and what I'm saying here and my putting you on my platform and you putting me on yours is a very healthy thing. But it's a lot bigger, Ralph, than whether people can get on a talk radio show because my major point that I'm trying to make here, for the reason I was invited, is that talk radio and radio

in general is facing tremendous challenges in this new digital era, which is unregulated largely, not completely and that's a whole other issue. But it's relatively unregulated and where there's a tremendous amount of chatter. I was going to say before if this radio program had a YouTube version; if you had a YouTube version of this radio program, I think you'd be shocked at how many more listeners and fans you would have.

Ralph Nader: You make very important points, very, very sagacious points, Michael. And I'm not just reflecting your white beard of a profit. You make very, very important points like what you just did, especially the point on agism, especially the point on the young thinking that this is old-fashioned stuff; it's out of date, forget it, we're the future. We need to put an arm around the shoulder of the young and we need to talk with them not to them; we need to talk with them and not give up on them. A lot of parents have found that their children and grandchildren have distanced themselves, because the parents are not viewed as technologically literate.

Michael Harrison: Exactly. There's a huge . . . I mean, I consider the real immigration issue that we have in this country right now is not immigrants from Mexico or foreign countries. It's the immigrants from the 20th century. Those of us who come from the 20th century's time being a place in space, are facing the same problems that other immigrants come to a new land. The natives talk a different language. The natives are more nimble, more facile in dealing with the technology and the cultural apparatus.

And you say we put our arms around the shoulders of the young and tell them that we're not giving up on them? The real issue is the young should stop giving up on the older people. That's where the resource is. There's a tremendous wisdom to be obtained by the older generation, which is not one of the biggest negative byproducts of today's corporate culture. And it affects talk radio because I see it directly because they don't want to advertise on media that gets to the baby boomers. They don't want to spend their money reaching older people. They're obsessed with millennials and now they're becoming obsessed with generation Z. For some strange reason they think that's where the money is, that's where the future is, when in fact the boomers are the most active, informed, and lucrative audience to tap into, they don't. So the ageism problem, based upon the acceleration of communications technology in the 21st century, is also an impediment to the principles that you're discussing.

Ralph Nader: So well said, so well said. I mean, the baby boomers buy a lot of things too. It's inexplicable. It's not like they're phasing out their consumer purchases. I mean, even AARP is falling prey to this. If you look at the covers of *AARP Magazine* that goes out to 19 million people, it's like people in their 50s who look in their 40s and there are all kinds of people in their 70s, yeah, in their 70s, 80s, 90s; they're very active. And I keep telling the editors of the magazine, look your readers are not getting any younger; you got to show them how people 10, 20 years older are leading very active productive lives--put them on the cover. And I gave them all kinds of names and they wouldn't put them on the cover. And they just I think put Bruce Springsteen on the cover recently.

But you're right, ageism is a huge taboo. It's a huge subject and I hope we can all begin talking more about it. Let's talk about *Talkers*. Tell us about *Talkers*. How did it get started [and] what are you doing with it.

Michael Harrison: *Talkers* is a trade publication. It started out as the trade publication for talk radio. And now it's a trade publication for talk media because talk radio doesn't exist in a vacuum. Talk radio is part of a web of podcasting online shows, satellite radio and cable news talk television, which was inspired in its growth by the success of talk radio. So *Talkers* is a trade publication very much like *Billboard Magazine* is in the music business or *Variety* is in the film and show business business, [and] *Women's Wear Daily* in the garment industry. I started it in 1990. My background is as a broadcaster and as a trade journalist. I have careers on both levels; I had a very colorful career in both. And in 1990 I saw the coming of talk radio as a major, major industry within the radio industry and I started *Talkers* as a newspaper. And it evolved into a magazine and now it's an online brand. We do annual conventions. You've attended a number of them in the past. We're 31 years old and we've never thrived. We've always been among the most successful trade magazines in the radio business. Currently, we might be the biggest or certainly one of the one or two biggest trade magazines that cover radio and its related media. When I say we've never thrived, [I mean] nobody's making millions of dollars here. It's a labor of love and dedication to the principle that the media is important and that radio is important, very similar to your point of view. I'm just maybe a little bit more accustomed to it, or you know, resigned to it than you are. That's what *Talkers* is. It's talkers.com. It's not a fan magazine. It's not really geared to listeners but those listeners and audience members of talk media that really love it find it behind the scenes to be very interesting. But it's not a fan publication. It's for professionals in the business.

Ralph Nader: But fans should read it because they can benefit from it. We've been speaking with Michael Harrison, publisher and editor of *Talkers*. Michael, this is a great conversation. I think our listeners would agree and we want to continue it because it deals with very important issues affecting our country and the world that are not usually candidly discussed. Thank you, Michael.

Michael Harrison: Thank you very much, Ralph. It's been a pleasure and an honor to be on the program with you engaged in such an exciting conversation. Please keep up the good work. There's certainly a need for it.

Ralph Nader: Thank you, Michael, many times.

Steve Skrovan: We have been speaking with Michael Harrison. We will link to his work at ralphnaderradiohour.com. Let's take a quick break to check in with our corporate crime reporter Russell Mokhiber. When we come back, Ralph is going to answer some more of your questions.

Russell Mokhiber: From the National Press Building in Washington, D.C., this is your *Corporate Crime Reporter* "Morning Minute" for Friday, August 6, 2021. I'm Russell Mokhiber.

Three schoolteachers in the State of Washington who sued the chemical company Monsanto over exposure to materials in fluorescent lights have been awarded \$185 million. That's according to a report in the *Guardian*. The teachers, who worked at the Sky Valley Education Center in Monroe, Washington, said they suffered brain damage from exposure to PCBs [polychlorinated biphenyls] in the fluorescent lighting at the school. This was the first of 22 trials involving teachers, parents and students who spent time at the Sky Valley Education Center.

A 2019 Associated Press investigation found that millions of fluorescent light ballasts containing PCBs probably remain in schools and daycare centers across the United States four decades after the chemicals were banned over concerns that they could cause cancer and other illnesses.

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. Let's do some listener questions. This one comes from a Cheriesa Selman who is a Congress Club member and she says, "Good afternoon, Congress Club team. I'm reaching out to give notification that I've emailed both of my senators, Ted Cruz and John Cornyn. I've been emailing them consistently from January 2021 every two to three months with letters you've provided on the radio hour website. I want to let you know that I have not received a single response from them regarding my emails. Therefore I will take the next suggested step by Ralph and print the letters to post. Please feel free to contact me anytime if I can be of assistance." That's from Cheriesa. What do you have to say to that, Ralph?

Ralph Nader: Well, what I would also suggest is send your letters to the local office of Cornyn and Cruz. They tend to be a little bit more sensitive. Tell them what you're doing. You're spreading the word on the internet and send it to the Democratic Party in Texas, especially Beto O'Rourke, who is going to challenge Ted Cruz I'm sure in another four years.

Steve Skrovan: All right, thank you for that question, Cheriesa.

David Feldman: This question comes to us from Irwin. "Dear Ralph, I'm finding it difficult to reconcile my dependence on your show amongst others to provide balance and insight into the machinations of the US of A, foreign and domestic, your position of free speech, etcetera, with your all but silence on the case of Julian Assange. I have written you before to no avail, response or reply. I'm not looking for a mention but rather for you to elaborate your position on this rather urgent issue; for it is too late for him once he is extradited."

Ralph Nader: Well, Irwin, you can't have read or heard everything I've said. I have spoken out about Julian Assange and Edward Snowden and others, not only on free speech grounds, Irwin, but on grounds that they have released information documenting crimes of the government and other institutions. So it's rather absurd that people are interested in the US government in indicting Julian Assange who now is in a jail in England after being under in effect house arrest at the Ecuadorian Embassy in London, not by Ecuador but by the police who were standing outside ready to nab him as he left the embassy for disclosing evidence and videos of crimes, like knowingly killing innocent civilians in Iraq by U.S. Air Force. These are the disclosures of serious crimes. They should be given awards not prosecuted!

Steve Skrovan: So you've written about this in your columns?

Ralph Nader: A long time ago. I mean, I haven't written recently. When he was on *Democracy Now!*, for example, which he's not on anymore. I can't give you a site or evidence, but I've said the same thing about [Edward] Snowden. It's absurd [chuckle]. These people are exercising the rights under principles of democracy to reveal and disclose crimes. I mean, there are some federal statutes that require government employees to disclose evidence of crimes. They get awards for that. Outside citizens don't get awards. They get harangued, prosecuted, exiled. They should be given prizes.

Steve Skrovan: It's interesting to me, Ralph, that there'd be people who will lionize Daniel Ellsberg for revealing the Pentagon Papers [*Report of the Office of the Secretary of Defense Vietnam Task Force*]. And Ellsberg himself says Snowden and Assange are doing important work

yet the same people who lionize Ellsberg say well, that's different; it was different what he did. Was it really different what he did?

Ralph Nader: It was bolder and more important than what he did. He basically released a government report that was full of obvious descriptions that David Halberstam and others like the *New York Times* reported from Vietnam. So it wasn't like inner secrets. What Snowden and Assange released were evidence of crimes like snooping on every American by the NSA [National Security Agency] in violation of the Fourth Amendment. That's a pretty serious crime translated into a statue called the FISA [Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act] statute; it has a five-year jail term as a first class penalty! That's a pretty serious crime because Assange and Snowden got to the core of the national security state/of the corporate state, of the systemic lawlessness, of the violation of our constitution's federal statutes and international treaties, they are pilloried. Because what they are released went to the core of the fascist systems that have been in place for so long and unchallenged by Congress and the courts.

Steve Skrovan: I happen to have a short conversation with my congressman, Adam Schiff. This was probably about five or seven years ago with a couple of friends. And we brought up the subject of Edward Snowden. And I think Schiff is on the intelligence committee and he sort of nodded as we sort of lauded Snowden as a hero. And his only response was "I think it would be best if Snowden stayed in Russia," which if I'm reading into it, which I am, he kind of deep down knows that Snowden is right. But for practical reasons his advice is it wouldn't go well if you came back.

David Feldman: The courage of Mike Gravel, like I said sarcastically. That's the other problem, right, Ralph, that we don't have any politicians like Mike Gravel?

Ralph Nader: That's right. Mike Gravel is the only senator who sat there at the committee level. All the other senators were not present. And he read out loud page after page after page of the *Pentagon Papers* protected by the speech and debate clause of the Constitution so he could not be censored or prosecuted.

Steve Skrovan: Thank you for your questions. I want to thank our guests again, Michael Harrison. For those of you listening on the radio, that's our show. For you podcast listeners, stay tuned for some bonus material we call "The Wrap Up." A transcript of this show will appear on the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour* website soon after the episode is posted.

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

Steve Skrovan: For a copy of *The Day the Rats Vetoed Congress*, go to ratsreformcongress.org. And also check out *The Ralph Nader and Family Cookbook: Classic Recipes from Lebanon and Beyond*. We will link to both of those on ralphnaderradiohour.com.

David Feldman: Ralph wants you to join the Congress Club. Go to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour website*. And in the top right margin, click on the button labeled Congress Club to get more information. We've also added a button right below with specific instructions about what to include in your letters to Congress.

The producers of the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour* are Jimmy Lee Wirt and Matthew Marran. Our executive producer is Alan Minsky.

Steve Skrovan: Our theme music “Stand Up, Rise Up” was written and performed by Kemp Harris. Our proofreader is Elisabeth Solomon. Our associate producer is Hannah Feldman. Our social media manager is Steven Wendt.

David Feldman: Join us next week on the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*. Thank you, Ralph.

Ralph Nader: Thank you everybody. When you read *The Day the Rats Vetoed Congress*, my fable, but a lot of realism, you’ll want to join the Congress Club.

[Music]

Listen to me people,
Do you understand
We got to
Stand up
Oh, you've been sitting way too long

Oh, step up
You know what's right and you know what's wrong

Rise up
Don't let the system pull you don't
Stand up, stand up, you've been sitting way too long

Stand up, oh, step up
Step up, just step up

Rise up
Rise up and take all the power

Stand up, stand up, you've been sitting way too long

Stand up
Stand up
Step up
Step up
You ought to step up

Rise up
Rise up
I know you ought to rise up

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