

RALPH NADER RADIO HOUR EP 251 TRANSCRIPT

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

David Feldman: Hello. Hope you had a good Christmas.

Steve Skrovan: Excellent Christmas. Excellent visiting relatives, a lot of travel. We also have the man of the hour, Ralph Nader. Hello Ralph.

Ralph Nader: And we have the question of the hour by Dr. Ronald Fraser.

Steve Skrovan: That's exactly it. We're going to get into that. And I believe we have a very engaged group of listeners. Many of them tell us about how they have taken the practice of citizenship seriously and called their congressional reps and contributed to the many citizen groups we have promoted on this program. But not everyone is like that. In fact, many people feel powerless and as a result, retreat and when that happens, the big money interests have all the say. Our guest today is Dr. Ronald Fraser who has written a book about this phenomenon entitled *America, Democracy, and You: Where Have All the Citizens Gone?* He argues that today the idea that the people have the power in our democracy, that we actually rule ourselves, is a myth. Then he describes the ways that American Citizens can turn that myth into a reality. Speaking of reality, in the 2nd half of the show we're gonna turn our attention to the so-called Blue Wave. As you all know, the Democrats flipped 40 seats for the new Congress that will be sworn in the New Year. Many of those campaigned on the very progressive platform. Will they actually keep their promises? Ralph has come up with ten ways you can measure whether those progressive Democrats are for real. We will be going through those point by point so get ready to take some notes, except of course if you're driving a car; then it's safer to go to Ralph's blog, or wait for the transcript of this show to come out. In between all of this substance, we will always check in with our Corporate, Crime Reporter, Russell Mokhiber. But first, let's find out where all the citizens have gone. David?

David Feldman: Ronald R. Fraser has been, for decades, a Washington-based writer. Dr. Fraser received a PhD degree in public policy from George Mason University. He now lives in the Buffalo, New York area. His writings have appeared in the New York Times, the Washington Post, and dozens of other newspapers, magazines and in professional public managements journals. The book we're going to discuss today is entitled *America, Democracy, and You: Where Have All the Citizens Gone?* Welcome to the Ralph Nader Radio Hour, Ronald Fraser.

Ronald Fraser: Thank you.

Ralph Nader: Welcome indeed Dr. Fraser. You really have been probing what I think is the most fundamental question, which is citizen motivation--the absence of citizen motivation. Where have all the citizens gone indeed? Are they showing up--marches, rallies, town meetings, even voting? Half the people or so vote in presidential elections--a little more. And on congressional elections, they are almost down to one third turnout, and two thirds stay home. I found your paperback very engaging. Listeners should really read this. It's only a hundred pages, but it's got really a lot of intensive readable material in it. And I just want to start with chapter 5, because you break out four different kinds of citizens, which include altogether everybody. So, they fall in one of the four categories of what you call a citizenship style. The chapter starts your quoting from Spiro, 1969, an author, "Constitutional democracy is based upon the political responsibility of the individual citizen, because it rests upon the consent of most of the government." So, let's talk about the types of citizens. But before we do that, I just want you to state the thesis of your book, so people will get the context. America, Democracy and You: Where Have All the Citizens Gone?

Ronald Fraser: Where did they go? That was, I guess, the motivation for me over the years, to try and answer that question. My thesis on the book in a nutshell is that basically everyone gets a start in their citizenship style in high school, in civics classes or government classes more now than civics. Civic classes are dropping; ten or fifteen percent of the kids get a civics education. But in some manner or form, kids in high school, in courses of government and civics, learn that the people are the root of all political power; they have popular sovereignty. And that's a basic sort of a myth, I would call it, but a basic promise of our education system of kids is that when they leave school, the kids are the bedrock of our democracy. The problem is, once they leave school and become engaged in careers and what else, and begin to understand what political processes are around them, they found that in fact they are not the bedrock of the democracy, that it doesn't work that way. And in poll after poll, they claim that they're powerless, that the people in Washington put people's opinions at about 20%, corporations and lobbyists and the money interests at the top of the ladder. The citizens, one by one, have to come to terms with this dilemma, this dichotomy between what they've been promised in school, and what they find in reality. And they have to adopt some sort of a coping mechanism to reconcile this in their own mind. This is where the four categories come in.

Ralph Nader: Okay, let's talk about the four categories. Listeners, see which one you fall into. The categories are, "The Self-Rule Idealist," "The Self-Rule Pragmatist," "The Civic Fatalist" and "The Civic Dropout." And they each have an implied motto to their attitude. Why don't you start with the self-rule idealist, and give us an idea of what percent - I know this is pretty rough guesstimate - but what percent of the people fall in each category.

Ronald Fraser: Yeah. The idealists are the people that are like you Ralph; you're an idealist. They're are the people, the citizens that are out there trying to make the self-rule democracy work. They are the leaders on environmental reforms, et cetera. I estimate that about five percent of the people coming out of high school probably fall into that category and it grows to maybe 10%. They have an advocacy framework in their mind. They want to make the gap between what they've been promised in the way of a strong citizenship, and the promise and political reality--the gap, they're trying to close that gap. And they work hard at it. Some of them burn out and when they burn out, they either fall into what is a fatalist or they just take a vacation over to pragmatism where they just make believe that the gap doesn't exist.

Ralph Nader: And the self-rule idealist motto is power to the people so, let's talk about the self-rule pragmatist.

Ronald Fraser: Yeah, this to me, the other two categories we're gonna talk about--the fatalist and the drop out--are sort of out of the picture. They're no longer players. But in this pragmatist group, I believe that about 85% of the high school students when they get out of school, I would put them in this pragmatist group. They sort of believe that yeah, what they learned in school made sense; they are the bedrock of democracy. But over time, they wither away. They see the reality; they see a gap between what they've been promised and what they're getting. This gap shrinks, I think to let's say 50% of the adult population. And what their key characteristic is, is that, how do they reconcile this gap? The idealists want to **change** it. They want to close the gap. They're mean and they're angry about the gap. The pragmatists take it more for more granted and they do it by what I call suspending. They willingly suspend their disbelief in the fact that the citizens are the core of the democracy. They suspend this belief; they know it's not true, but they pretend, simply to live with themselves and go about business, they pretend that it's true. So, they're a huge reservoir of citizens who are on the fence. They're not the fatalists or the drop outs where they've fallen away. They're hanging in there with this delusion, and that I think is the reservoir of the people that Ralph Nader and Common Cause, and everyone else is trying to draw into the arena, the public arena.

Ralph Nader: You describe them as people who allow family and job-related matters to take priority over civic duties. They're often politically silent, but active as soccer moms, members of community good-works organizations, et cetera. They limit their political activity to occasionally voting in elections. That's a big arena there. Before we get back to that, what about the civic fatalist?

Ronald Fraser: Well, I see the civic fatalist as I would say zero of the high school kids that are graduating from high school; zero of them would be in that category in my estimation. It becomes filled up, maybe over time with about 30% of the adults; they're either the idealists who get burned out and just give up and become a fatalist in that they no longer really care about the gap between reality and promises. And they're pragmatists that also decide that I can't go along with this suspension; my disbelief really doesn't work. The system is rigged against me and they become a fatalist. They simply say city hall is

gonna rule so it's a pipe dream that it could be a self-rule democracy. So that's how the fatalist system I think is where the true believers and the halfway believers finally reconcile in midlife or whenever.

Ralph Nader: You say their motto is "You can't fight City Hall", which a lot of people who don't get engaged rationalize. You know, like "The big boys - they're always gonna decide." What about the civic dropout? The motto you say is democracy is rigged against the little guy.

Ronald Fraser: Yeah, I just think that category, ten percent, I would estimate that ten percent of the kids coming out of high school, for one reason or another, never buy this idea of political, popular sovereignty--the citizen is important. Either they're poor students, or they just don't believe it. You and I, when we talked some time ago, we would put in there I guess, people who are ex-convicts, who have got a lot of civic penalties against them; they're probably in their illness people mentally ill, people, those who just really don't function very well. I think you and I talked once that maybe even single moms would fall in there. But, I'm not sure I'd put them in there, but these are folks who have some sort of a reason why they're sort of barred from taking part in the civic arena. And it's not a decision on how to cope with the gap between the promise of citizenship and the reality. That's not what drives them in there really. I think it's some other factor of life, poor luck. They're in there for a different reason. The fatalists however, are in there because they gave up or they got worn out, they got burned out. That's the difference between fatalists and the drop-outs in my categorization.

Ralph Nader: That's the description. How do you propose to turn it around?

Ronald Fraser: Yeah, that's the sixty-four-thousand-dollar question, Ralph. In the book, I survey, what a scholar would say, is a survey of the literature to see how scholars over the years have tried to solve that problem. Some say that the citizens are just inadequate; they will never be able to perform the duties of a self-rule government. Some say the system is rigged and they'll never be able to really get engaged because they're outclassed by the professional lobbyists, et cetera. Then some say the elitists are always gonna rule. I don't really buy all of that. I guess I tend to think that the long-term reform is we have to stop telling kids in high school that they are the political bedrock and then not arm them with the resources--the mind-set and the skills to actually engage successfully in the political arena. As long as we keep setting kids up from high school for defeat when they get out into the real world, this pragmatism--the box, is gonna grow and grow and that's one way that you won't solve the problem. The other way is exactly what you're trying to do, Common Cause is trying to do, Women's League of Voters is trying to do, and that is to somehow shame the people that are in that pragmatist box--to shame them that they're not doing their job; they're not preparing, performing the duties of a citizen and this is harming the country, and the well-being of everyone. How you shame them, how do you draw them into the arena--I just read just the other day Ralph, of your Rats Re-Form Congress book. I heard about it; I read a little about it; I want to see it. It seemed to me what I know about that is it has some sort of means in there, a step-by-step program to draw accountability to the congressmen by

people in the districts. That's one way. I don't have an answer to how you bring the people into the arena. It's a very, very tough question.

Ralph Nader: Well, you know, historically, here's how it happens, one, it's an issue that has great emotional provocation--personal, emotional provocation. The farmers were being pushed into the ground by high interest rates by the banks and high freight rates by the railroads so they had to do something. Their families were nearing starvation in the late 19th century or the workers in the early industrial plants or the slaves in the abolition movement or the women's right-to-vote movement. I think the analogue today is health insurance is being denied; even when you have it, they deny the claims and tens of millions of people don't have it. More millions of people are under-insured. It's complex, it's time consuming, it's irritating. People die who can't afford health insurance to get treated in time. There may be other types of provocation that get people in the streets, get them marching, demonstrating, collaring their legislators--there aren't that many law makers in the country--state and congressional. And it needs money. You know, the rich people helped fund the abolition movement. Rich people helped fund the women's suffrage movement out of Boston, Philadelphia, New York. And you find that major movements attract a few of the very enlightened, affluent people in this country, to pay for the organizers and the expenses. It's really bizarre that this isn't happening now, when there are so many deprivations, and that people are sliding behind. Usually analysts say, well, people don't get too upset from getting something that they don't have. But if you take it away, if you freeze wages, for example, they should get very, very, active and move into the civic arena. Well, the minimum wage has been frozen, 30 million workers as I've said many times, making less today than 1968, workers adjusted forward to inflation. Let's get our Steve Skrovan and David Feldman in on this. Everybody thinks about why aren't people showing up? Showing up is half of democracy. Why are they tied to their cell phone, to their TV, to their computer--when they think the way we do? There are a lot of things wrong in the country--fossil fuels, problems in the cities. It isn't like it's idiosyncratic.

Ronald Fraser: Yeah, I think there's two different points here. One is yeah, when you really pinch the American population economically, they're gonna do something. They're gonna act, they're gonna write letters, they're gonna go to the street, and they're gonna make a lot of racket, Occupy Wall Street for instance. But that's one way that things can move a little bit. But what I'm thinking of that's really lacking is this endemic day-in and day-out keeping your eye on the accountability of government processes. Even when we don't have a huge national crisis, citizens should be tuned into what's going on and is it right morally--not just economically. Is it the way government should be acting in my behalf? That is, that mindset is lacking too much in the population.

Ralph Nader: I think we have to start asking provocative questions, like hey people own the public airways, how come the corporations control it for nothing 24 hours a day and keep you off; keep you off from talking about your local problems or your national or international. How come my pension funds are not using all that stock they own in corporations on the New York Stock Exchange to change the behaviour of these corporations? How come my taxes are used to blow up people and countries around the third world, and our bridges and high ways, and schools are crumbling for lack of repair.

Ronald Fraser: That's what's missing. That kind of ongoing day-in and day-out question and answer is basically missing in America.

David Feldman: Can you call yourself patriotic if you hate the idea of government?

Ronald Fraser: Well, you know, we have a long standing - this is another topic - but we have a long standing anti-statism coming from the founding. And the Republican Party and neoconservatives are common today as the reincarnation of that.

David Feldman: I don't understand, I'm sorry to interrupt, but I don't understand how you can love America, but hate the idea of our founding documents--the idea of a government.

Ronald Fraser: Well, I don't want muddy the waters, but the anti-statism ethic is that Americans do not want a very strong government, because they fear a strong central government. Because of that, these promises in the Constitution, the Declaration of Independence and elsewhere, like egalitarianism, sovereignty, popular sovereignty, individualism--these values, these promises are never fulfilled in America because Americans on the other hand don't want a strong enough government to enforce it upon the system. My leader in that regard is Samuel Huntington, *The Promise of Disharmony*, has a book on that. It's an undercurrent of why people have this double standard on government. It sort of changes around the Depression, when government became very much involved in the day-to-day existence of individuals.

Ralph Nader: Let's simplify it, let's simplify it. Let's take the lesson of the farmers and how they changed our country in the late 19th century—the Populist Progressive revolt was the most fundamental change—not as much as they wanted, but certainly by today's standards. Let's say a couple of billionaires hire 1,000 well-trained organizers to work every day in communities all over the country, to rev them up, so they each talk to a thousand people a week. That's tens of millions of people. And they sign them up for an agenda. Let's say it's 10,000 people/10,000 organizers, whatever. In other words, it's person-to-person; it's not virtual reality. It's not television screens. It is people going into neighborhoods, where there are already often meetings, clubs for example, and signing them up for say, ten changes in America that are long overdue: living wage, full Medicare for All, cracking down on corporate crime and abuse against consumers and workers, and a different kind of tax system, public transit, rebuilding America, waging peace, getting rid of all the corporate bloat and corporate welfare. I mean there's a lot of left/right support for all this, as we've said. Now, I think that would reach the 1% level. I think we'd have in every congressional district, 1% of the people signed up working together, to change Congress. You change Congress, you can change all these issues and more in the right direction that I've just mentioned. Why don't we try something really focused, because if we get too general

about it, too philosophical about it, we can wear ourselves down, never mind our listeners. What do you think of something like that?

Ronald Fraser: Yeah, I think as long as, and I think your idea of keeping it at the congressional level, is a large 700,000 population districts nowadays, but still, when you start saying, what is our congressman doing to solve this problem? What is our congressman doing that he shouldn't be doing or that he could be doing? And I think there's a lot of potential in that approach.

Ralph Nader: Bringing him back to town meetings, may, as I've said in the past, there's nothing to stop people from getting hundreds of signatures, and demanding the Senators come and meet them on the citizens' terms--not the usual visit during the election campaign where the politicians flatter, fool and flummox the people. They're very good silver tongues there. I think we really should focus on, what if we had 10,000 lecturers/organizers in one year. Just think of how many people they could reach if they all, in small groups, they reach a thousand people a week per lecturer and it starts adding up. I think they'll be surprised. I think a lot of people don't get active because they don't think it will make any difference. So, they say, why try--whatever will be, will be. But if they think a lot of other people are gonna join if they join, then the esprit de corps begins to change. This is a really nice book to read listeners, it's very readable, *America, Democracy, and You: Where Have All the Citizens gone?* It gets you to ask the kind of questions about your neighborhood and your community that you may not have asked. How do people get this book Dr. Fraser?

Ronald Fraser: Amazon sells it. You can send me \$10 and I'll send it to you.

Ralph Nader: Okay, and give your address.

Ronald Fraser: 7744 Center Road. The town is West Falls, New York, 14170. I will make it available; \$10 that includes shipping.

Ralph Nader: And, it's a great discussion book, listeners. You really want to get your four, five, eight, nine, ten friends and neighbors to discuss it. And you can take off from there to start these Congress Watchdog groups. Just as I've said in my recent fable, *How the Rats Re-Formed the Congress*, it all connects. If you go to ratereformcongress.org, you'll see more practical information on how you can form these citizen groups--starting small and then building, building; you'll see the impact on your two Senators and Representatives. It's like magic. There's just nothing out there except the few people fighting valiantly on a single issue. But they're not going together to get the summons to the Senators and Representatives to get back and meet your person-to-person, eyeball-to-eyeball--no flack, no intermediary. That's how you send them back to Washington saying, uh-oh, they're waking up back there, we better get going. Thank you very much Dr. Ronald Fraser, who's the author of *America,*

Democracy, and You: Where Have All the Citizens Gone? It's got a nice cartoon on the cover by [Tom] Toles, the Washington Post cartoonist. It shows someone digging in a pile of campaign cash, green dollars, and saying, "there's got to be a democracy in here somewhere". Thank you very much Dr. Fraser.

Ronald Fraser: Thank you. Ralph, you know, one final thought, the idea of - and I haven't read your book, the Rats Re-Form yet - but I think what comes to my... the picture I've got in my mind is what would be forming are these small Chautauquas. If you go back to the 19th Century Chautauqua idea, long before television and what not, this is a way that the common guys could get stimulated on intellectual items by a traveling show, a Chautauqua. You know, maybe somehow liking this idea of congressional district Chautauquas is a means for the citizens to come together and address these issues just like the 19th century folks did.

Ralph Nader: Well, everything starts with a discussion, doesn't it? Everything starts with a conversation between, two, four, six people. The Chautauqua tradition, look it up, it's really important, as Dr. Fraser said, it got a lot of people together all over the country for serious changes. Thank you again Dr. Fraser.

Ronald Fraser: Thank you.

Steve Skrovan: We have been speaking with Dr. Ronald Fraser. The book is America, Democracy, and You: Where Have All the Citizens Gone? We will link to that at ralphnaderradiohour.com. Now let's take a short break and find out what's going on in the vast underworld of corporate crime with our Corporate Crime Reporter Russell Mokhiber. When we come back, many of them have talked the talk. They got elected. Now we'll see if these Democratic members of Congress actually walk the walk. Ralph has some ideas about how you can find that out. You're listening to the Ralph Nader Radio Hour. Back after this.

Russell Mokhiber: From the National Press Building in Washington D.C., this is your Corporate Crime Reporter "Morning Minute" for Thursday, December 20, 2018, I'm Russell Mokhiber. A Chinese factory worker has survived being skewered with ten metal spikes when a robot malfunctioned. The 49-year-old was working on the night shift at a porcelain factory in Hunan Province, when he was struck by a falling robotic arm. The accident resulted in him being impaled with foot-long, ½-inch thick metal rods, the People's Daily reported. Six steel rods fixed on a steel plate pierced his right shoulder and chest, and four penetrated elsewhere in his body. During the operation, doctors found that one of the rods had missed an artery by just .1 millimetres. The rods also prevented doctors from carrying out x-rays before the operation. They were relatively big, so there was no means of fitting the patient into the x-ray machine, while the nails themselves could have caused interference with x-rays, said Wu Pan Fang, an associate professor of hand microsurgery. For the Corporate Crime Reporter, I'm Russell Mokhiber.

Steve Skrovan: Many of them have talked the talk, but will these new democratic members of Congress actually walk the walk? Ralph has written a new column entitled, "Are the New Congressional Democrats For Real? Use These Yardsticks to Find Out". Now Ralph, you give ten yardsticks by which to measure the newcomers. Let's go through them one by one. What's the first one, Ralph?

Ralph Nader: First one is they've got to really shake up Congress inside so they can speak more freely, get more hearings, not be restricted by these rules, and get the committee chairs, and the subcommittee chairs to have the authority they had years ago, which has been stripped from them by the top four leaders--two Democrats, two Republicans, who've concentrated power in their hands--and that's [Republican] Senator [Mitch] McConnell, Congressman Paul Ryan, Republican Speaker of the House, [Democrat] Senator Chuck Schumer, and [Democrat] Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi. The second thing you've got to do is organize themselves.

Steve Skrovan: Hold on Ralph, let me just unpack that first thing first. These are like freshmen. They're coming into high school. They're the new people. They go to a meeting. They're told, "Okay, you're gonna spend these many hours on the phone raising money. Here's what you do; you speak when spoken to." How do you overcome the freshman hazing?

Ralph Nader: Yeah, they're trying to process them into the Congressional cocoon on Capitol Hill. Right off, they've got to raise money in small denominations, which a lot of them have, just the way Bernie Sanders did. And they have pledged they're not gonna take money from PACs. So, they're already on the right track. They're not gonna go every afternoon on weekdays, outta their office, down to some private office building and get into a cubicle and be given a list of names of fat cats to call, so I think they're out of that part of the cocoon.

David Feldman: And it seems like Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez seems to be the one with the highest profile who's actually defying that, would you agree?

Ralph Nader: Yes. That's got to be continually reminding them to stay the course there, and not get tantalized or lured into all these "PAC parties" that go on in Washington around Capitol Hill every day, where the corporate interests like the oil companies, the gas companies, the drug companies, the insurance bank lobbyists, wining and dining them and telling them what they want in return for their cash contributions to their campaigns. In order to get this, they have to develop their own caucus. They can't have this anaemic Progressive Caucus. It's just a way to control any potential rebellion against Nancy Pelosi. I mean they're not progressive by any standard. They don't return calls to citizen groups who want to have legislation filed or hearings. They got to form their own caucus, give it some distinctive name so they act as a group. You know 25 people organized tightly can have great leverage

in the House and in the Senate. The southerners who obstructed the civil rights movement taught us that lesson--how a few people can really jam up the system if they don't get their way. Of course, I don't want to compare these people with the southern segregationists, obviously. But it does show that a few people banding together, like the Tea Party, controlled the Republican Party in the House; there never were more than 32 of them. They are very, very well organized and demanding.

Steve Skrovan: That's point two, is to see if they organize themselves into an effective caucus.

Ralph Nader: Yeah.

Steve Skrovan: So, number three is what?

Ralph Nader: Number three is whether they invite the national citizen groups down to their office. Whether they say they want to work in a coalition with these groups that have millions of members around the country you know, Public Citizen, Common Cause, People For the American Way, national center for this, national association for that civic purpose—they're all around. And what happens is a lot of these new members of Congress don't want to connect with these citizen groups, because they think the citizen movements are pushy. They think they'll expose them if they take money from a PAC. They just want to be left alone. And before you know it--two, four, six years and you can't tell any difference between them and the ones who have been there for a longer period of time. So that's the test is someone like a new Bernie Sanders coming in. You say, okay, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, is she gonna connect with the citizen groups here? Is Rashida Tlaib from Detroit area, is she gonna connect with the citizen groups? And all the others who have won on a progressive platform? And they were really upset. They were really the people who were upset, either in the primary or in the general election, very stodgy incumbents. That is one of the major yardsticks in my experience. If they don't connect with all the groups who have agendas that they agree with, then they're turning themselves into lone rangers.

Steve Skrovan: So, it's obvious that the groups would be contacting them. They just need to return the calls, right?

Ralph Nader: Yeah, exactly. I mean we're gonna ask them to initiate pressure on committee chairs to hold public hearings. There are dozens of public hearings that have got to be held, which is the next yardstick. Are they gonna push for hearings on corporate crime? For hearings on single-payer? For hearings on waging peace over war; pulling back on the empire? For hearings on procurement-contract reform, about hundreds of billions of dollars to defence contractors, health care corporations and so forth. Are they gonna push for hearings on lifting the minimum wage immediately from this \$7.25 an hour? And if the committee chairs resist, what are they gonna do? They're gonna go to the office and have a sit in? They're gonna protest? They're gonna join rallies around the Congress? They're gonna go

back home and connect with town meetings? We got to hold them to reality here. We've waited every two years for all these promises, and they all get processed and fall into the congressional cocoon.

Steve Skrovan: So, that's the fourth yardstick is the empowerment agenda and getting hearings that will deal with all these issues.

Ralph Nader: Yeah, the empowerment agenda is they've got to have election reform, get rid of voter suppression. You don't have to motivate them on that. They believe it obviously. But the difference between belief and action is sometimes quite distant, and we have all kinds of ways to shift power from insurance companies to policy holders; from banks to depositors; from big landlords to tenants; from a whole series of dominant corporations--from credit card companies and so forth. It's called "the facility of the check-off." When they give you a bill or send you a message, they have to carry an invitation to join your own citizen group, non-profit group, and you get a seat at the table. You get the ear of your members in Congress or your state legislature. Anyway, that's something; there should be a hearing; there have never been hearings on that. There should be hearings on expanding consumer cooperatives, on creating more trade unions, on giving the wrongfully injured more access under tort law in courts of law--trial by jury. More power to shareholders--imagine, you have all these mutual funds, pension funds, and individual shareholders; they are legally the owners of these big corporations, these global corporations. They don't have any power. That's a big, big support structure out there. They'll come in 80/90 percent in the polls. Most of these changes come in 70/80 percent, which means conservatives, liberals agree; they lock arms back home--an unstoppable political force. Let's stop creating obstacles of our own lack of imagination and energy.

Steve Skrovan: So, your fifth yardstick here harkens back to what we just were talking with Ronald Fraser about, town meetings, talk about that.

Ralph Nader: Yeah, that's another lever of action on your 535 members of Congress--Senators and Representatives. And you basically, if you are newly elected progressive, and you really want to have a revolutionary Congress as Rashida Tlaib told Gary Cohen, who was former chair of Goldman Sachs, at an educational meeting at the Kennedy Center at Harvard University recently, when he told her, hey listen, you don't know how things work in Washington. She said, yeah, you're right, we're gonna have a revolutionary Congress. Well, one way to do that is encourage people back home to initiate their own town meetings--their own agenda. So, when these newly elected people go down to the folks and meet the voters, they get a real base there. They get a real motivated base. So, when they go back to Congress they can't just be seen as single legislators. They come with a mandate, with people who have put their names on the line, on the petitions.

Steve Skrovan: The sixth point is regularly publicize the horrendously cruel and wasteful Republican votes. Talk about that.

Ralph Nader: This is the most amazing dereliction of the Democratic Party and why they lose so many elections against the worst Republican Party in history. It's not just that the Democrats are taking money from the special interests as they're called; they're doing a lot of that. It's that you can't even get them to publicize in July, August, September, October--election year--the worst cruel, vicious votes of the Republicans in the House and Senate. It's a recorded vote; they can't deny it! They go after pesticides protection, which are killing the farm kids, for example. They want to knock out adequate food services or insurance for kids. They vote against women's safety and health. They try to strip the social [safety] net. They try to block people who are horrendously injured by defective products or toxic chemicals from having their day in court. They take the people's taxes and give it in tax breaks to the rich and corporate. They cover up for all kinds of corruption, corruption, corruption, that weaken the enforcement of health and safety laws that save lives and prevent injuries and diseases, like the EPA and the Food and Drug Administration, the Auto Safety agency. It's all there. It takes them like five hours to prepare a deadly press release. And we couldn't get them to do it. We met with top Democrats in the House. And they said, "Yeah, that's a good idea." I mean if you can't publicize the bad votes of your adversaries for the people back home, just give it up.

Steve Skrovan: Ralph, name some names for me, who have we gone to? Who's the Citizen Movement gone to recently--these senior Democrats who refuse to do it and why?

Ralph Nader: We went to Congressman Crowley, who a few days later was defeated by Ocasio-Cortez in New York. He wasn't paying attention to anything back home. She beat him coming out of nowhere. He was heading to become a leading candidate for speaker of the house; he'd been there for over 20 years. We spoke in that room to Congressman Joe Courtney from Connecticut and Congressman Jamie Raskin from Maryland, and Congressman John Larson, my congressman from Connecticut. And the only one who actually did it, who only publicized all these bad Republican votes was Jamie Raskin from Maryland and he put it on his campaign website, about 20 of the cruellest votes. Of the Democrats, nobody picked it up--none of the other Democrats; he did the work for them. It was most puzzling. I have no idea.

Steve Skrovan: What is the psychology behind that?

Ralph Nader: I have no idea. There are a lot of questions I have reasonable answers for. This one beats me, unless they [the Democrats] just don't want to win. Unless they don't want to advertise votes that might get their campaign contributors' noses out of joint. Let's say there was a vote by the Republicans to weaken the access to courts of law by wrongfully injured people. And let's say these Democrats publicize that. Well that's gonna get a lot of political action committee PACs out of joint. You know, insurance--they want to restrict access to the courts called "tort reform"; I call it tort reform. A lot of companies that have injured workers and toxic chemicals in the environment; they don't want to be

sued. So, that's the only possible reason and it's the most corrupt reason you can imagine. It's a reason that would disqualify the Democratic Party from being the alternative party to the corporate warmongering, ignorant, vicious, cruel, Republican Party. Some people may think I'm exaggerating. No way. You cannot believe how cruel and vicious the majorities were, and still are in this Congress. They cover it up with public relations, with slogans—"we're for you, we're for the American people, the American flag, the American soldier, the American beleaguered taxpayer"—lies!

Steve Skrovan: All right, wow. So, number seven, your seventh yardstick for these new Congresspeople: you talk about the corporate lobbies, taking on them. Talk about that.

Ralph Nader: Well, every time a corporation comes to them or NRA comes to them or AIPAC [American Israel Public Affairs Committee] comes to them and say, "We want your vote", and the newly elected Congress people say, "No, we don't want your money and you're not getting our vote on this issue." This is bad principle. It's bad policy. It's an injustice that they disclose it [by] actually putting out a press release saying they have experienced attempts to twist their arm. Maybe sometimes they'll say, "Well if you don't do what we do, you may have a primary challenger in a year or two." Publicize the corrupt lobbying on Capitol Hill. And there are a lot of worse examples. Publicize it. And that will throw the lobbyists back on the defensive. They might not go up there so often. They might stop harassing the progressive members trying to seduce them, trying to tempt them, trying to wear their progressive resistance down. And that has happened in past decades. They keep coming back again, and again. When you publicize it or you even have a reporter in your office because you know that they're coming to try to bribe you in effect legalized bribes, campaign contributions in return for doing what they want, then you'll be free and clear. You'll have more time to spend with honest people, doing honest things for our country.

Steve Skrovan: Now, the number eight yardstick for these new Congresspeople has to do with refusing PAC donations. If they refuse PAC donations, that's a good sign.

Ralph Nader: Yeah, social media is good on that. You'll get a lot of small contributors. You have much more credibility. You'll have less anxiety and dread when you're on Capitol Hill; worrying about all these fat cats--they drive you nuts. Have I done enough for them? Did we get the call returned for them? They're trying to nullify the votes of the American people with cash. That should be done away with. It should be public funding of public campaigns and that's one of the bills and one of the hearings that these new members of Congress should be pressuring the old bulls [on] and exposing them if necessary.

Steve Skrovan: Ralph, maybe you don't know the answer to this question, but what happens to a freshman Congressperson coming in. Let's say it's Rashida Tlaib or maybe actually even a less high profile one and they go to the democratic congressional caucus headquarters, the DNC and they say,

“Okay, your first three hours of your day are going to be in this little cubicle. You’re gonna be making calls and here’s your list.” What happens in reality when they say, “No, I don’t want to do that?”

Ralph Nader: Well, they say to them you’re gonna pay a price; you might get challenged by someone in your primary—even if you come from a safe, democratic district.

Steve Skrovan: Isn’t that a strong incentive to go into the cubicle?

Ralph Nader: It depends on the personality and character of the new politician, obviously. I think these are pretty good ones. I haven’t seen better ones for a long time than the 25 or so out of the 40 net seats that the Democrats got. Of course, the more they work their district on things that are needed by the people in their district, the less they need to raise money from these fat cats. They could just thumb their nose. I mean Senator William Proxmire—my favorite example - Democrat from Wisconsin—he won six elections, maybe seven elections—either 36 years or 42 years. And he never raised a cent from anybody. He spent a few hundred dollars every six years buying stamps to send back contributions that he didn’t ask for. How did he do it? Well look, first of all he was a workaholic. He had all kinds of public hearings on the necessities of the people. When Congress was on vacation, he’d be at work, and he’d get good press because there wasn’t much going on. The second thing he did, he walked the state, literally. He was a runner. He walked the State of Wisconsin and he took on jobs, like he’d be a garbage man for a day. He’d be pumping gas for a day. He’d work in a nursing home for a day. How can you defeat somebody like that?

Steve Skrovan: Well that, maybe should be an 11th point, which is use William Proxmire as a role model.

Ralph Nader: Yes. Proxmire was invincible. He often had no serious candidate in Wisconsin. Look at Wisconsin now, dominated by the Republicans. The governor is still a Republican. Although the new governor is gonna be a Democrat. But it basically turned into a red state on many issues, because the Democrats in Wisconsin forgot the lesson of Senator William Proxmire. I might add, the lesson of Senator Gaylord Nelson. He didn’t walk the state, but he represented the necessities of Wisconsinites and was never defeated until the landslide of Ronald Reagan defeated Jimmy Carter and he was pulled down by the undertow in 1980.

Steve Skrovan: Okay, your 9th yardstick that we’ve talked a lot about on the show, and you wrote a book about it. You talk about building left/right coalitions in Congress.

Ralph Nader: Yeah, I think a lot of these issues, without repeating, are supported by conservatives and liberals. The newly elected members should get over the “yuck factor”. They should basically say, look, I’m gonna get left/right support in my district for this. I’m gonna get left/right support in the House if they’re on the same page I’m on, and I’m not gonna say yuck because they oppose reproductive rights. We’re never gonna get conservatives agreeing with progressives on all these issues. You take an issue at a time. You make sure that the left/right coalition doesn’t dilute your issue. You don’t split a deal; you maintain your integrity. You say you’re going 15 bucks an hour of minimum wage or whatever and you build this powerful left/right coalition. That’s what passed the Free Information Act in 1974. Left/right, that’s what passed the False Claims Act--returned \$65 billion dollars to the American taxpayer from fraud on the government by corporations; that was in 1986. That was Republican led in the Senate, Democrat led in the House. They passed it over the lobby’s objections. That’s what passed Whistle Blower Rights Laws--left/right-- invincible politically. They shouldn’t shy away from it, because the conservatives are pushing something that they, the progressives, are opposed to in another arena.

Steve Skrovan: What has always been appealing about that to me is you always hear people say we need to elect people who are able to reach across the aisle and compromise and what you’re proposing here is reaching across the aisle, but it requires no real compromise, because on the left and the right, they may come to the same conclusion, but for different reasons and find those issues.

Ralph Nader: That’s right.

Steve Skrovan: Your 10th yardstick--demand wider access to members of Congress by the citizenry. Talk about that.

Ralph Nader: Yeah, what the Republicans have done is they’ve limited congressional hearings. They have limited the number of citizen witnesses or teachers/professors that used to testify and as a result, they’ve opened up the pundits and the consulting firms to sit in front of the Senators and Representatives and give their spiel and that has weakened the citizen groups enormously and that’s very true for judicial nomination hearings, like the latest one for Brett Kavanaugh, where we would be invited to testify--no invitation. It was a rigged hearing, mostly dominated by the Senators, obviously. And, so a lot of his vulnerabilities, other than the sexual harassment issues, were not paraded before the media and the American people. He is a corporation masquerading as a human being. And, that wasn’t emphasized enough. Again, and again in his judicial decisions in the Circuit Court of Appeals, he came down on the side hard of corporations abusing consumers, abusing workers--corporations wanting secrets and privileges. And that would have defeated him in those hearings, but they rigged the hearings. So, what the new members of Congress have got to say is we’ve done a study and these national citizen groups are not included in hearings and they are not listened to for new hearings that you, the Republicans, have shut down to keep up the data on consumer abuses, for example; how all these penalties in the telecommunication contracts and credit card and credit score and all of that--bounced check, \$35 when it cost the bank a buck. You got to keep up with these abuses and that’s what

they should do. I tell you, 25 members of the House--boy can they make waves and the press will have to report it, because it's in the House of Representatives; it's hard to ignore.

Steve Skrovan: So, again the Tea Party is the model for this on a democratic side. It's sort of a progressive Tea Party that you're calling for?

Ralph Nader: Yeah, arguably Steve, the Tea Party of 32 hardline, right-wing representatives drove out the Speaker John Boehner and the word is, that's one of the major reasons why Paul Ryan, the successor to John Boehner as the Speaker, has quit politics. This drove him crazy.

Steve Skrovan: Well, those are the ten yardsticks. We'll come back and probably revisit this in the new year and see who is actually measuring up.

Ralph Nader: And the article with these yardsticks is on nader.org. If you want to, you can sign up and automatically get my column every week.

Steve Skrovan: Well excellent, thanks for taking us through that Ralph. Let's open up the mailbox, shall we? David, do the honors.

David Feldman: Jared Savinski writes, "Who do I contact to discuss regulation of airline fees and ticket cancellation charges?"

Ralph Nader: I'd like to say the FAA. You should do that anyway, because the more complaints come in to the Federal Aviation Administration, they put them out based on complaints against specific airlines like Delta or United. And, so the more come in, the more members of Congress start saying, hey, people are really getting upset. But don't expect much of a response, other than the value that I just pointed out. But you might want to contact a great consumer reporter who every week writes a column on airline passenger-protection issues for the Washington Post. His name is Christopher Elliott and you can reach him through his email, chris@elliott.org. That's chris@elliott.org. He uses case examples for his column.

Steve Skrovan: I want to thank our guest again today, Dr. Ronald Fraser, author of *America, Democracy, and You: Where Have All the Citizens Gone?* A transcript of this show will appear on the Ralph Nader Radio Hour website, soon after the episode is posted.

David Feldman: For Ralph's weekly column, it's free, go to nader.org. For more from Russell Mokhiber, go to corporatecrimereporter.com.

Steve Skrovan: Ralph has got two new books out, the fable, *How the Rats Re-Formed the Congress*. To acquire a copy of that, go to retreformcongress.org. And, *To the Ramparts: how Bush and Obama paved the way for the Trump presidency and why it isn't too late to reverse course*. We will link to that also.

David Feldman: 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.

David Feldman: Make subscribing to the Ralph Nader Radio Hour one of your New Year's Resolutions. Happy New Year, Ralph.

Ralph Nader: Thank you everybody. Happy New Year. Let's have a more just New Year. There's another yardstick I've come to know. People are ordering five copies at a time of *How the Rats Re-Formed the Congress*. Could it be living room discussion time? That's the seeds of progressive change in America.