

RALPH NADER RADIO HOUR EP 259 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: Good morning, everybody.

Steve Skrovan: Good to have you here. And we have the man of the hour, Ralph Nader. Hello, Ralph.

Ralph Nader: Hello, everybody, you'll see what a few citizens can do to make a difference for all of us.

Steve Skrovan: You are exactly right. On the show today, we welcome back legendary environmental activist, Lois Gibbs. For those of you who don't know, Lois Gibbs was the young mother who organized her neighborhood and brought national attention to the toxic waste dump at Love Canal in Upstate New York. That was back in the late '70s. And Ms. Gibbs has been a toxic-waste avenger ever since. She founded the Center for Health, Environment and Justice in order to help other grassroots activists organize and get action on the toxic threats in their neighborhoods. She's going to tell us how her grassroots activism, including an update on that underground fire that was heading toward the nuclear waste dump in St. Louis. Also, on the show, we welcome for the first time, the new Executive Director for the Center for Auto Safety, Jason Levine.

The Center for Auto Safety was founded in 1970 by Consumers Union, and Ralph, as a consumer safety group to protect drivers. Automakers in the government were not adequately regulating safety, so the Center for Auto Safety was created as an independent outside watchdog. We'll also talk about their latest campaigns, *The Car Book*, and everything else auto-related. In between, we will squeeze in the latest Corporate Crime Report from Russell Mokhiber. And if we have time, we'll also try to knock out a few listener questions. But first, let's hear from a true citizen advocate who continues to fight the good fight.

David Feldman: Lois Gibbs was the activist who brought national attention to the 20,000 ton toxic chemical dump near her home in Niagara Falls, New York. She organized her neighbors into the Love Canal Homeowners' Association, which eventually led to over 800 families being moved from that toxic area. On the heels of that victory, Ms. Gibbs created the Center for Health, Environment and Justice. That's an organization that has assisted well over 10,000 grassroots groups with organizing, technical and general information. She's the winner of numerous environmental awards and was the subject of a CBS TV movie entitled *Lois Gibbs: The Love Canal Story*. Welcome back to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*, Lois Gibbs.

Lois Gibbs: Thank you.

Ralph Nader: Welcome back indeed, Lois. I've talked a lot on this program over the years about how one person can make a difference and you're the poster woman for that. Your leverage has been unprecedented, and I'll illustrate that by the large environmental groups that have many millions of dollars in annual budgets, and they do good work. They litigate. They lobby, like NRDC and EDF and others, but they don't have a grassroots capability. They have a lot of donors and a donor list from around the country. But Lois Gibbs's group has a great grassroots capability--thousands of little groups who are not engaged in theory; they're desperately trying to protect their family and their children from lead contamination, from cancerous chemicals in the neighborhood, leaking toxic dumps and water contamination. And so, people might want to know that Lois Gibbs used to have celebrations every two years. All these little groups would come to a big jamboree and they would talk about their victories (not just their challenges, not just their failures) to prevail over the toxic warriors and the corporatists and the polluters and the deregulators, but their victories. And so, with that background, tell us about the kind of techniques you use to organize these little groups all over the country, Lois, because I think our listeners are interested in how you managed to do it, because you basically started with just a sense of urgency and a determination and a full-time commitment.

Lois Gibbs: Yeah, that's what we do. And it's interesting because people in the communities, they understand one thing: no one's going to help them unless they help themselves. So, first challenge always is to convince people that government is not going to serve you. These are people who are low-income, working-class people--people who have been dumped on all their lives about lots of different things. And so we work with them to say, okay, so you got that no one's going to help you unless you create that pressure, so how do we do that? How do we create that pressure? And we really walk them through a process that really talks about what is your problem, what is the solution, and who can give that to you? And so instead of people just looking at scientific studies about how much they're breathing in of mercury or carbon dioxide or lead or whatever, it's like what can you do to create the political pressure. One thing we've learned and you know this better than anybody Ralph, is that democracy works if people get involved, if people take a stand, and if people are willing to take a risk. And that's not true of the Environmental Defense Fund people. They're not willing to take a risk. They want access to the White House. What we do is we go up there with our signs, and our voices, and our banners, and we hold politicians accountable and we do win. We win more than we lose at the grassroots level just by organizing neighborhoods, helping them figure out what the problem is, what is the solution, who can give it to them, and then going after that, whoever that who is, and taking personal risks. I mean some people get arrested, some people write letters they've never written before, some people hold rallies in street theaters; you know there's a whole combination depending on where you are geographically.

In the South, the women don't like to get arrested, because in society of the South that doesn't work but they're willing to have parades or willing to hold elected officials accountable in different ways. And then in the North, getting arrested is a point of pride, (right?) in organizing. So, it depends on where they're from, how we do it, but we are--even under this horrible, horrible, horrible administration--we are winning. We have 15 community sites, superfund sites. These are sites that pose the highest risk to human health and the environment because of contamination. It could be contaminated water. It could be contaminated soil. It could be an old dumpsite. It's a number of sources. But you have to really be--a site has to really risk human health and the environment to get on this list. And 15 of these sites that have been sitting dormant, for 20 years in some cases, we have gotten this administration, again through our grassroots effort, people organizing, people speaking out-- not just playing defense, but playing a little defense and a whole lot of offense--to get these sites cleaned up. So, in Houston, for example, in Houston, Texas, there is a site there, waste management, International Paper is the polluter. It's been there for 20 years. We've convinced the Trump Administration to dig it up and take it out and dispose of it properly at a cost of over \$200 million and the polluters are going to pay, not the taxpayers.

Ralph Nader: There you are, listeners, I mean what Lois is talking about, is she started out powerless as a blue-collar mom in Niagara Falls and built power out of a sense of urgency, a sense of fear about safety for her children, and a commitment. And that's what she did with thousands of people around the country—people who had no sense of their own power; she showed them how to have a sense of their own power and how to build it because they're voters. They have the numbers. They have the knowledge. Nobody can deny their experience. Nobody can say they got an axe to grind. They can stare down these lawmakers and get through. So just recently, Lois, you wrote an article for *The Hill* newspaper, congratulations. It's not easy to get article in *The Hill* newspaper. And it's called “40 years after the Love Canal Crisis, I Still Feel Unsafe”. And it's about the growing evidence that there's lead in more and more of the drinking water in the schools in our country. Can you describe the thrust of your article and what the legislation is that the members of Congress are sitting on?

Lois Gibbs: Yeah, I mean, it really is true. In this day and age, it's hard to believe, but the vast majority of schools, both public and private, have never tested their water for lead. And where there is testing that is occurring, mostly because parents demand it, where that is occurring, they're finding lead in the drinking water supply. So, here you're sending your child to school to learn, to grow, and instead, they're being poisoned with lead and no one's looking. And the reason the school board is not looking or the school entity in itself is because they don't want to pay to replace the pipelines and they're worried about lawsuits and there's all of these reasons. In the meantime, children are being poisoned every day. So, we were pushing for legislation, which now has to be reintroduced, is to make it mandatory that every school in this country, especially a public school that gets public money, be tested for lead in it's drinking water supply and that there is a grants program because schools are strapped. We all know public schools have a horrible time funding their ongoing school programs. But because they're strapped

for money, that there is a grant program, so that if lead is found in school pipes, they can immediately change that. And so this is an easy fix. We know lead causes problems. We know there are learning disabilities. I sort of call it the circle of poison, poverty, and prison because these children go to school, they get lead poisoned. They can't succeed at school.

Ralph Nader: Brain damage.

Lois Gibbs: Right. They have hyperactive and IQ loss, whatever. So, they drop out of school and then they end up hanging out on the street corners. They end up getting arrested and going to jail, and then they come back out, and they get married, and they have children, and the circle just continues. Lead, we can deal with. We understand lead and it's not an expensive fix. Yes, it does cost money, but it's not an expensive fix. The other thing that's interesting, Ralph, is that in all subsidized housing, HUD housing, in subsidized housing, it is mandatory that they test for lead paint in these buildings and they don't always do it as we all know. But it is mandatory that they do it so we could hold their feet to the fire. What is **not** mandatory is that this HUD housing gets checked for lead in its water.

So why would you just look at paint and not look at the water in a building which, again, is subsidized with taxpayers' money, to help people to have a home to live in, to grow and prosper, and hopefully become successful in life and their children successful in life. Instead, they get poisoned at school, they get poisoned at home. I can't tell you how many HUD housing developments and apartments have lead in the water. And these are for people who are low income so they're not going to be testing their own water. And even when they find it, the landlord says, "So move out."

Ralph Nader: Just to be clear, Lois, for our listeners in terms of the history, we fought to get lead out of gasoline in the '60s, '70s. Get lead out of paint all over America in the '60s and '70s. They were never necessary in the first place. It was the lead lobby that had this terrible, cruel history of greed and cover-up of tests. And the lead in drinking water, now in the schools, just to be clear, it's not coming from the original water sources--the lakes or the rivers or the wells. It's coming because the pipes are leaching the lead and they're not being replaced or modified because we're not willing to invest in our children's health and safety, instead the plutocracy and the military-industrial complex is spending tens of billions of dollars blowing up places overseas. Again, we always have to come back. Does this country really care about its children? Is this country placing our children first? Not at all. And in your article, and I'm going to quote it. You say "The Environmental Protection Agency estimates that about 90,000 public schools and half a million childcare facilities are not regulated under the Safe Drinking Water Act, which we pushed through in the early '70s because they depend on Water Resources such as municipal utilities. They're expected to test their own water." Now, isn't it true that a preliminary lead tests can be conducted by the students in high schools in their chemistry and biology lab under the tutelage of their teacher?

Lois Gibbs: Oh, yeah. You can go to Home Depot and get a lead testing or one of the home stores and get a lead testing kit for \$22. It's really simple to test, but they don't want to do it because they don't want to fix it because they don't want to spend the money, and instead, they're just going to poison the children. I mean, that's what they're doing. I helped organize in Flint. And when I was in Flint, the stories these moms told, just heartbreaking stories of children who were your normal, average child in development for their age, who then started drinking this lead water, lead-based water from the pipes, right? They didn't know it. Moms didn't know it. And suddenly their child is having seizures, has sores all over their bodies, are unable to sit still and learn, and probably lost IQ points as well. It's like we did that. We did that to them. So, the idea that our government allowed thousands and thousands and thousands of children--and men and women, of course--but children to be poisoned because nobody wanted to deal with the expense of changing out those pipes in the Detroit water and all that, the whole story that's behind that.

Ralph Nader: Do you find, Lois, that our politicians go crazy now, for political purposes, for some blackface episodes that occurred in the 1980s by a governor of Virginia, and they don't give a damn about black children being poisoned every day in public schools and private schools all over the country? What's going on here? This is like an insanity.

Lois Gibbs: It is totally insane. There's a group we're working with in Birmingham, Alabama when you talk about people of color being poisoned. So these children are being exposed to lead and arsenic in their yards. The agency says "Strip your children. Strip your children at the door so they don't bring this lead and arsenic and chemicals into your home." Not "We're going to clean it up or stop ABC Coke/Drummond from polluting or the ash piles blowing all over the yard." It is the parent's responsibility, somehow, to strip their children. And I will tell you as a mother of four, my children were not going to be stripped at the front door in front of their siblings and everybody else, right? It's like what is that about, you know? I mean, it's not really foolishness, but all this political garbage that's out there and blackfaces and all that stuff. And here we have innocent children, innocent family. They are dirt poor. You can't get poorer than these folks, right?

Ralph Nader: Um-hum.

Lois Gibbs: And their entire community is spiraling down. Because of the contamination, no one can sell their house. No one can get a home-improvement loan for their home. So, if they have a hole in the roof, then they have a hole in the roof. There's no way they can get any money on their property to fix that roof, so the roof collapses. So, you walk in this neighborhood, which was once a thriving, healthy, low income, but thriving healthy, privately owned little tiny homes in North Birmingham that today, its boarded-up houses, its collapsing roofs, its children who are going to school while this lead and arsenic and all these chemicals are blowing in their face; what kind of country do we live in that we allow these people who have—you know, they vote, they're good

folks, they go to church, they care about their families. They want the same dream as Trump's kids want or someone like them, right? They don't have different dreams than wealthy people. They just want to grow and prosper and yet our government is so busy talking about this garbage political stuff and whatever the tweet is of the day. Nobody is putting a camera on the fact that here was a community, a thriving, healthy community that because of ABC Coke and Drummond and all of these facilities is now so far spiraled down; it looks like worse than a ghetto.

Ralph Nader: And then they can't get health insurance to get diagnosed and treated in time. In the meantime, trillions of taxpayer dollars are flowing out of communities like that all over the country for empire's illegal criminal wars abroad blowing apart innocent people and their public facilities and boomeranging back on us in an endless cycle. So, I think we ought to connect all this and you have an example in your *Hill* article and I'm going to read the description. "There is the case of Fayetteville, West Virginia where the local school's principal purchased sanitary wipes for the school bathrooms so students wouldn't wash with the water for fear of serious chemical exposure." West Virginia, an overwhelming Republican pro-Trump State by the way.

Lois Gibbs: Yeah, and that's still going on today in the nonprofit charitable organization who was bringing bottled water for the students. The school didn't supply it. This nonprofit local group was supplying it. When they raised the flag about we have to change the pipes, we have to do something, they told that charity that if you raise the flag and make a stink about this, which is why I did, we are no longer going to accept your water for our students. Why would you punish the students and the faculty, because it's insane, right? That's really insane.

Ralph Nader: Well, nobody has gone around the country and talked to more people about toxic, deadly exposures and what can be done about it than you, Lois Gibbs. Can you explain to our listeners why to this day, millions of people go up the wall when they hear bad words--ethnic, racial, gender--but they are indifferent to deadly deeds in their community that are taking lives and destroying health and safety that's preventable?

Lois Gibbs: Well, I think it's all about money. It's easy to be distracted by this other stuff as opposed to nailing it locally and fixing the problems. I don't get it myself. I just don't get it. I mean people I'm working with is not obsessed with all this political garbage that's coming in and going out. They're obsessed with trying to get their kids something.

Ralph Nader: So, you've managed to focus them and get their moral indignation toward action. How do you do that? Let's say you're on the stump now and you're making a pitch for them to get mobilized, because as you say, "Only they can change the situation." How do you talk to them?

Lois Gibbs: I think there's two things. One is that if you don't get organized, you're going to die, period. I mean, that's what I said to the people in West Virginia, it's like, if you do not organize, you are going to die because nobody cares about you.

Ralph Nader: Yes.

Lois Gibbs: Yes, it's the honest truth. Nobody will say that. Someone will say, well if we work for this regulation, maybe we can move some money. That's sort of the green group. I'm like, no. You live in Minden, West Virginia. You have a PCB dump here. You can either organize, figure out what you want and how to get it or you can stay here and whine and die. That is your choice. The other piece of what I do in the street is give people hope. Of course, you can win this. Of course, you can win this. This is not impossible to win and not only can you win the cleanup of Minden, West Virginia and obviously clean water for the local school, but you can figure out how to do some economic development here that actually benefits the community and doesn't hurt the environment. Minden, West Virginia is a wonderful place to put like recreational industry in there, hiking and swimming, and it's really beautiful in West Virginia. If you have never been there, you should go there. It's really pretty. And so it's not just about cleaning up the mess in front of you, but you can talk about economic development, if not this then what? And how do we get to the what. And who do we need to talk to for the what. So I think a lot of what we do is we give them hope and we sort of help them because they already know where they want to go. But we help them think about what is the possibilities. What can you do in Minden, West Virginia in helping build jobs.

Ralph Nader: Lois Gibbs, let's talk about a tough state in your experience. You have three grandchildren who live in Texas. And last year, a state bill was introduced to mandate testing of lead in drinking water, all schools in the state. You say the bill never passed. "Why?" you asked. "I'm not sure, but I did find a 2017 study conducted by Environment Texas that showed 65% of schools in Texas that tested their water for lead found levels greater than the standard recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics." Why isn't anything moving decisively in Texas other than the heritage of George W. Bush, who when he was governor, ignored all kinds of cruel conditions affecting children in Texas on behalf of his corporate paymasters?

Lois Gibbs: Well, that bill failed because it's about public school. People who have power in Texas are people who send their children to private school, so they don't care. All those legislators, their children aren't going to public school in Texas. Their children are going to private schools. And private schools, I'm sure are checking or at least they're checking if they're checking, right? And the answer to that, Ralph, is yes, we should have a state law, we should have a federal law actually, but we should have a state law in Texas that says every school should be tested. But our way around that is to get involved with the PTA and PTO and we say, "Look, you guys need to test your school. Here's a testing kit, go forward." And if we get enough schools at the local level, enough parents angry, then we can move a state law in the State of Texas, but it's ridiculous. It's ridiculous we'd have to fight so hard for something so simple and it's not controversial. You're sending your child to school; you should be able to have your child drink clean water.

Ralph Nader: Well you know, Lois, a lot of political scientists who've written about apathy and lack of democracy in our country, have a lot of reasons that they give us as to why people don't wake up an act, why they don't move from apathy to action. And I'll tell you, I cannot fathom why any parent in America, who listens to the evidence about lead in drinking water in so many schools and wonders whether their children are taking that lead in their drinking water in their school down the road, doesn't do something when it's a \$32 kit that they can buy in the store with their fellow parents and start the ball rolling to clean up the drinking water. I mean, how powerless can people be? I mean have you faced people, who after you tell them what they can do with their neighbors, to get the ball rolling and to put the officials on the defensive in the school system to do something?

Lois Gibbs: Actually, I don't find that and I think it's because when I go in there with my little testing kit and my PTA and PTO, they're ready to move because you've given them the tools, you've given them the sense of hope, and you've shown them the way, I think most people are apathetic, if you want to use that word, because they don't know what to do. And it's easier when you don't know what to do to just hide and pretend like something doesn't exist. Then if somebody says, look, here's your first three steps--to buy this kit, test your school water; if it comes back, then you go to the school board, you talk to the supervisor, you do this, you do this, you do this, and you give them a roadmap. I think one of the things that we all know, as a mom, is that our schools stopped teaching critical thinking. And so many people can't think critically. Like, how do I go about doing this? Like it is some kind of, you know, you need a PhD to figure it out. No, it's simple. It's not complex. It's simple. You get a test, you test the water, you go to the school, you go to the supervisor of the school, you go to the school board, you go to the legislators. This is really not that difficult. But one way we suppress people and I'm not talking about you and me, but one way that people are suppressed is they're told that things are much more complicated--you don't understand; it's bigger than you think; it costs more than you think. There's all these ABC, DEFG agencies out there that you need to talk to. And by making it complex by this overarching society, making it complex, people are frozen in place.

Ralph Nader: You know that's right. Because once they make the first move then the bureaucracy puts up another obstacle and they're not quite aware how to overcome it. And when they do, there's another obstacle and they begin to wear out or burn out. But what you're telling us, there needs to be more people informed in more places all over the country. How do people get in touch and how do they support your Center for Health, Environment and Justice, which you say is a project of People's Action Institute?

Lois Gibbs: Yeah, well people find us on the web and that's at chej.org, so www.chej.org. They find us on the web and then we begin to have a conversation there. Donors can give on the web and community people who need help can inquire on the web and we literally get back with people within 48 hours and let them know what we can do. And we're in the streets all the time. And I'm in the newspaper much like you, Ralph, and people find me from that as well. Google Lois Gibbs.

Ralph Nader: People now might wonder how did you turn out the way you did, Lois Gibbs? You were quote: an ordinary mother in the suburbs of Niagara Falls raising your children, going around the community, being helpful, and then suddenly, something deep inside of you decided you were going to do more than just evacuate your neighbors from the deadly, toxic, waste dump under your homes, called Love Canal, euphemistically. Hooker Chemical and others left that deadly residue behind. How did you become a national leader? They really want to know. How did you turn out who you were and you've authored books, you've testified, you're everywhere.

Lois Gibbs: Well, after Love Canal, I decided I wanted to help other people. I'm still, to this day, mad as hell because I keep meeting people who are being sacrificed in the same way my family was chosen to be sacrificed by Occidental Petroleum, the State of New York, the Federal Environmental Protection Agency. And that's sort of motivation that no, they won't. They will not kill another child. I will make sure I do everything I can to help this person defend themselves against the corporate polluters, against the agencies. And I don't know how I got here. I just sort of got here, but it really is that sense of passion and justice that nobody has the right to take from someone else--their lives, their health, their property--like, no one has that right. And to treat people because they're low wealth or working class, as disposable people, no! And doing this over the 37 years, I developed all of those skills; I didn't come in with all these skills. I'm a high school graduate, but I learned them as I went forward, fell on my face a few times, made some mistakes, and also figured out how to move through those very careful, sort of pathways to success.

Ralph Nader: Well, that's very important, listeners, because the more you do this citizen action work, the better you get. It's like anything else with a hobby or a skill, occupation, profession, sports, and a lot of times people don't realize that; they just say well, gee, I don't know how to do this, therefore, I don't want to start to learn how to do this. And I remember when you were battling in Love Canal. John Richard and I came up and had a news conference with you. And at that time you were fighting the New York Department of Health and others that were trying to pooh-pooh what you were complaining about with your neighbors and the deadly toxic under their homes. And I turned to John and said, "watch out; here's another citizen leader on the rise." And you have not disappointed one day, Lois Gibbs. I hear heavy breathing from David and Steve thirsting to ask you questions or making a point they want to make.

Steve Skrovan: Yes, Lois, I've got a question. When you were on our show, I don't know about a year and a half, two years ago, we were talking about a thing that was going on in St. Louis where a landfill had caught fire underground and that fire was heading toward a nuclear dump that had residue from the Manhattan Project. And it talked about the imminent threat of a Chernobyl-like event. Can you give us an update on what's going on there? What's happening in St. Louis or what happened?

Lois Gibbs: Yes, I'd be happy to. So, the folks there have organized really well, they're

very strategic; they're focused on the Trump Administration. And they got then Administrator Pruitt, to agree to come to get the industry, which is Republic Services there, to get the industry to clean up the dump, literally--take the radioactive waste out of the site and store it above ground on the site in a protective sort of container of some sort. That's going to cost over a hundred million dollars to do, which is really exciting. The scary part is that when the government shutdown, stuff was happening around that radioactive waste and there was nobody monitoring it. So those 35 days, there was nobody watching what was happening there. And so that was really, really scary.

Steve Skrovan: So, they haven't done this yet, but it's in the works?

Lois Gibbs: It is in the works and we're hoping to have shovels in the ground by the end of this year.

Steve Skrovan: And is the clock still ticking? Where's the fire now?

Lois Gibbs: The fire is still moving towards the waste site. They put cooling pipes down there to try and keep it from catching. I mean, it still has the great potential of being a Chernobyl-like event--that children go to school every day and do not know if they're going to come back home. Because if that occurs, if the fire hits the radioactive waste and it goes up into the air, the children will likely be in school for three days. That's how long it will take for them to check every single area to make sure that it's safe to release the children. So it's still an imminent threat, but there is a solution on the horizon, which is really good. And the landfill next to it that's burning beneath the ground is still burning and it is still moving towards a radioactive waste.

Ralph Nader: What's the distance between King Kong and Godzilla?

Lois Gibbs: Six hundred feet.

Ralph Nader: Good heavens.

Steve Skrovan: Wow.

Lois Gibbs: Yeah, it's not very much at all. And that's why they put these cooling pipes down and other sort of things in hopes to be able to stop it from getting there. I mean literally, nobody from the scientists and the nuclear business could tell anybody in the attorney general's office what would happen other than, because it's never occurred before, other than a Chernobyl-like event.

Ralph Nader: You're talking two football fields.

Lois Gibbs: Yes.

Steve Skrovan: And this was something that Donald Trump's EPA, even under Scott

Pruitt thought, "Oh, we should do something about."

Lois Gibbs: Yes, they did. And part of the reason is that they have a responsible party that's viable that's Republic Services. And Bill Gates is on the board of that, by the way, his finance people. We did go to Bill Gates and asked Bill Gates to intervene and move these people who live right around there and he refused to respond at all. So, I just put that on the table. Yeah, so we went after Pruitt. We had a meeting in DC and Pruitt agreed to move forward on this one. And I think it's because it has a responsible party, which obviously is not a development company, so it doesn't upset the Trump Administration. And they could use the power of EPA to get them to do the cleanup.

Ralph Nader: David, do you have a comment or question?

David Feldman: Yes. Can you talk to me about Neil Gorsuch and his mother and what she did during the Reagan Administration? Judge Neil Gorsuch, Trump's first Supreme Court nominee.

Lois Gibbs: Yeah, so Anne Gorsuch Burford, so she got married. But Anne Gorsuch was the first administrator under the Reagan Administration of the Superfund program. Superfund was passed in 1980 and she was the first one that was supposed to implement the law and the regulations. She refused to give Congress a list of sites that are potential Superfund sites. And she went up and she lied to Congress and it was a horrible situation. She tried to dismantle all the regulatory angles in Superfund that would help communities who were faced with these horrible problems. Anne Gorsuch was so bad that they subpoenaed her to come to Congress and provide the list of the first 500 potential Superfund sites. She refused to come. She lied to Congress. She refused to give them the list and lied to Congress. As a result, she actually was charged with a crime, a felony. And while she was going through all of this, if you read Anne Gorsuch's book, her son, Neil, who is now the Justice, Supreme Court Justice. Her son Neil was 12 years old at the time and he said to his mom, according to her, "Please, mom, don't give them anything. Don't do what they're trying to make you do. You're just trying to protect the government or the industry or whatever it was. You're not a liar, mom. You're not a thief. You're not a criminal. You should keep doing what you're doing and not give the Congress what they're looking for." Well, I mean, he's a little kid, maybe, but he was supporting his mother breaking the law at the age of 12.

David Feldman: Was that off-limits during his confirmation hearings?

Lois Gibbs: I wrote a piece that got an editorial. I forget where it got put into that talked about it, but I didn't hear any of that at the hearing. I mean, he literally...it's in Anne Gorsuch's book, you can look it up, that he was defending his mother and saying, "You shouldn't do that, mom. You shouldn't do that."

Ralph Nader: Well, it's relevant, even apart from him being only 12 years old; it's relevant in the sense that that's how he was raised with those kinds of values. And she

was the head of the EPA, not just the Superfund, right?

Lois Gibbs: She was the head and under her was Rita Lavelle. Rita Lavelle was in charge of the Superfund. Rita Lavelle actually did go to jail. Anne Gorsuch Burford did not go to jail, but she had to do something. But Rita Lavelle did go to jail for, like, 60 days or some minuscule amount of time.

David Feldman: Imagine that.

Ralph Nader: Well, Lois Gibbs, we're out of time. We've been talking with Lois Gibbs, the Founder and Motivator of the Center for Health, Environment and Justice with all kinds of grassroots groups all over the country. And she stays at it at a heightened state of urgency. And please tell our listeners how they can join with your efforts if they choose to.

Lois Gibbs: Yeah. People who are interested, please go to our website. It's www.chej.org and you'll find oodles of information or you can leave a message for us and we can get back to you if you are concerned about a particular site or issue.

Ralph Nader: And you can get copies of Lois Gibbs's action-oriented, short but dynamic books that she's written over the years. Thank you very much, Lois.

Lois Gibbs: Thank you, Ralph.

Steve Skrovan: We have been speaking with Lois Gibbs, Founder of the Center for Health, Environment and Justice. We will link to that at ralphnaderradiohour.com. We're now going to take a short break and check in with our *Corporate Crime Reporter*, Russell Mokhiber. And when we come back, we're going to talk to Jason Levine, the Executive Director for the Center for Auto Safety. Back in a minute.

Russell Mokhiber: From the National Press Building in Washington, D.C., this is your *Corporate Crime Reporter* "Morning Minute" for Friday, February 22, 2019. I'm Russell Mokhiber. In 2013, the Swiss pharmaceutical giant, Novartis, donated \$3400 to the anti-corruption group Transparency International - Greece. Novartis had been embroiled in a corruption scandal in Greece, accused of paying bribes to top public officials. And the corruption scandal will likely be a key issue in the upcoming elections in Greece in October. In addition to the funds from Novartis, Transparency International - Greece, has taken corporate donations over the years from major multinational corporations including Lockheed Martin, Coca-Cola, Nestlé, Unilever, KPMG, PWC, Ernst & Young, and GlaxoSmithKline. The corporate influence over Transparency International - Greece is part of a troubling pattern of Transparency International offices around the world being funded by and influenced by major multinational corporations. For the *Corporate Crime Reporter*, I'm Russell Mokhiber.

Steve Skrovan: Thank you, Russell. As most of you know Ralph, over the course of his careers, had a hand in helping create and promote hundreds of various citizen consumer groups, and it's no secret that he first came to prominence as a consumer advocate in the field of auto safety. And one of the groups he had a hand in starting to continue that life-saving work, is now headed by our next guest.

David Feldman: Jason Levine is the Executive Director of the Center for Auto Safety, which is an independent, nonprofit organization dedicated to advocating for auto safety, quality, and fuel economy on behalf of drivers, passengers, and pedestrians. Mr. Levine is a long-time consumer protection advocate and attorney. Welcome to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*, Jason Levine.

Jason Levine: Thank you so much for having me.

Ralph Nader: Yeah, indeed. Welcome, Jason. I just want to mention that the latest edition of the famous *Car Book* by Jack Gillis and others is about to come out. And this is a book that we featured with Jack Gillis some months ago. The best way to describe it is not only is clear, and graphic, and dark print, and easy-to-read, but I have yet to figure out one question that anyone who's buying a car--who's buying a new car, a used car, who wants to know about warranties, who wants to know about auto insurance, who wants to know about recalls--not one question have I been able to figure that this book doesn't answer. Tell us about it briefly.

Jason Levine: Sure, we're coming out in the coming days with the 39th edition of *The Car Book*, which we like to call *America's Most Comprehensive Car Buying Guide*. We rank about 180 or so new 2019 vehicles. And as you described, Ralph, it has not just information on the safety of every vehicle and all the various features, but it also has a lot of really good information for anyone going out buying a car. The one thing you probably didn't mention is we also have tire ratings in there. So, it really does help you from thinking about what is the safest car for you and your family, whether you're looking at a smaller vehicle, a larger vehicle, that's got a an EV guide for those looking for an electric vehicle or a hybrid. So, it's got all of that information in terms of the safety piece and as well as having quite a bit of information about how to get the best value when you're shopping and everything from how to negotiate with the dealer, how to think about the long-term service costs for that vehicle. And even it's got a chart in there about comparing leasing versus buying.

Ralph Nader: And how do people get it. Is it online? I know it's in print because I hold it in my hand every time it comes out.

Jason Levine: Right. So, there's actually now two ways to access all the great information in *The Car Book*. We now have a website called thecarbook.com--all one word. And when you go there, not only do we have all the 2019 ratings, it actually goes back for five years of used car ratings. People buy twice as many used cars every year as new cars. So, for folks looking to do some safety comparison ratings for some of the

more recent used cars out there, that's available only on the website at thecarbook.com. And it's free to members of the Center for Auto Safety who can join for less than half of the cost of a Netflix subscription at \$48 a year. Or you can just get, you know, I just need it for a month, then go on and get it for a month for \$9.99 just for one month. But the paper version, if you visit our website, autosafety.org, tells you how to go ahead and get the paper version. Or you could call us, 202-328-7700 and someone can help you there.

Ralph Nader: Well, most people who are going into the car-buying market and they want to know about crash test protect ratings, rollover ratings, maintenance costs, fuel economy information, insurance costs, lemon ratings, reliability by make and model of cars, insights on the best safety and electronic add-ons, ratings on used car models for the past five years, and information about the various electric vehicle options that are coming on. Tell me this, Jason. I want to be a bit obstreperous. I think the number of car buyers who buy this book or read this book in their library, is infinitesimally smaller than the number of car buyers who basically signal in every way--body language or whatever, when they go to an auto dealer--take me, I'm yours!

Jason Levine: There's no argument about that. I mean for the average person, cars are perhaps the most expensive thing we buy. If you buy a house, it's the second most expensive thing you buy. It's something that you are transporting yourself, your family, sometimes often your children, sometimes your parents, co-workers; it is both a significant financial investment certainly something that we want to be as safe as possible and comfortable as well and get good value out of. And more people than not, almost the overwhelming majority, will base their buying decision on a commercial, what their neighbor might have, the color of a vehicle. And so, what *The Car Book* does and continues to do, and has for almost four decades--provided the information to allow you to be an educated consumer when you're walking into the dealership or even choosing to take advantage of opportunities to look at vehicles online, that information is there for you to make a sound financial decision for your family as well as a good safety decision, which is what drives us every day.

Ralph Nader: It's beyond a good deal, it can save money, advance the safety of their car, save money not just on the initial purchase, but on how to negotiate the auto insurance market. It's so easy to save money in the auto insurance market. We did a whole book on this once, *Winning the Insurance Game*. But it just takes a little work. I always say, if people spend a few hours learning how to buy food and how not to buy food, and learning how to buy a car and how not to buy a car, and they add up what they save per hour, it's far more than they get at work per hour, far more. That's the way to look at it. I just learned something wonderful that just happened at the Center for Auto Safety. Tell us about the Remington Walden Auto Safety fund. Listen to this, listeners; this is really the creative sensitivity of bereaved parents.

Jason Levine: So, thank you for bringing this up, Ralph. It's really something where parents are trying to make something positive out of an awful tragedy. So, some of the listeners may remember in the late 2009/2010 period, there were a lot of reports of Jeep

Grand Cherokees catching on fire from rear collisions. Now this was because the gas tank was incredibly close to the rear of the vehicle and very low to the ground. And this was an obvious manufacturing defect. The Center, at the time, led by the late great Clarence Ditlow, petitioned the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration [NHTSA] to get these vehicles off the road. They were exploding; they were literally killing people. And NHTSA, unfortunately did not take action. Jeep, which was eventually then bought by Fiat (Fiat and Chrysler became FCA) did not take action. And three years after our petition in 2012, a four-and-a-half-year-old boy in Georgia by name of Remington Walden, was strapped in the back of the vehicle and was involved in a crash and was burned and died. And his parents, instead of taking the settlement that was offered by Jeep and Chrysler, said they wanted to go to court. And it was a long, long protracted litigation and they won initially at jury and then the judge reduced that amount of money, but eventually they won a very sizable settlement from FCA on the tune of \$40 million and they, with a desire to prevent this sort of thing from happening to anyone, whether it'd be a Jeep, whether it'd be a fire, or just these sorts of defects, they set up something called the Remington Walden Auto Safety fund at the Center for Auto Safety to work on these sorts of issues and really to help us move forward with safety. And we've opened it up to say anyone who wants to contribute to add to that fund to make sure that these sorts of horrific defects, that are preventable and knowable, don't impact others like Remington. We've opened it up to others to join them as well.

Ralph Nader: Let's turn to something else that you've been working on and that is the driverless car legislation. Now, consumer groups beat back the bill just almost passed. Passed the House and the Senate, essentially deregulating driverless cars and stripping the states of what authority they have on driverless-car regulation. What's the situation now? Is Senator Thune from South Dakota, the arch defender of driverless car manufacturers, going to do it again?

Jason Levine: We should start with, and your listeners should know, that you are not just an observer in this fight, as you have for so many years, you really did also help step up and bring attention to what were a couple of really bad bills that were moving through Congress, last Congress, and were helping us lead the charge for why essentially a wild, wild, west atmosphere with driverless cars was a terrible way to try and usher in some of the utility of this safety technology. So we first want to thank you for that. But the current status is, as we are now in the new Congress, they need to restart all bills. And so no new bill has been introduced so far. It's only been about a month and a half in this new Congress to, once again, attempt to assist the driverless- car industry. So we've been happy about that. There have been a lot of talk and there's been a lot of meetings, but no one has so far stepped forward. And so what we are hoping to see is with the change in the House leadership with the Democrats taking over on the House side, who were pushing for more safety portions of these vehicles of such a bill, pushing for more requirements be put on this sort of legislation that opens the door to potentially a lot of safety improvements, but potentially a lot of danger that makes sure there are some requirements in their regulation certifications put on the manufacturers. So, we're hoping to see a more consumer-friendly positive bill move forward if it's going to move forward

on the House side from Chairman Frank Pallone and Chairwoman Jan Schakowsky on the House side. Fortunately, in some ways, Senator Thune has left his chairmanship of the Senate Commerce Committee. He has moved on, he's now moving on to the Republican leadership on the Senate side, so he is no longer chairing that committee. It's now Senator Wicker out of Mississippi. So we'll see if we can get something better coming out of Congress this time around.

Ralph Nader: We're talking with Jason Levine, Director of the Center for Auto Safety. Jason, where can people get information from the Center about driverless cars? Because we want to make clear, semi-autonomous brakes are on a lot of cars now and other semi-autonomous, but the driver's still there. We're talking about totally autonomous cars, driverless cars where they don't even have a steering wheel. Where can they get good, accurate, clear information in the Center?

Jason Levine: Sure. So if you visit our website at autosafety.org, it has a lot of great information, but one of the things it does have on there is it talks about all the sort of ongoing activities that we're undertaking and a lot of good news reports about where things stand with autonomous vehicle technology. And that's everything from, for example, just the other day the District of Columbia held a hearing on a pilot program that they want to put on the streets. They want to allow Ford to come in and test their driverless vehicles on the streets in D.C. without any real demonstration of safety or requirements for things like cybersecurity or liability or really any of the things that we require of human drivers before they put these on the road. So we went and we testified in front of the D.C. City Council and said here are some things that really need to be considered and put in place before we allow our public roads to become testing grounds and allow our citizens to become Guinea pigs.

Ralph Nader: As you know, the Achilles' heel of the whole driverless car business from General Motors to the spinoff from Google, is they can't solve the hacking problem. They can't put these cars on the road. They can try to solve all these other problems, which you have clarified at the Center for Auto Safety, but they can't protect the drivers and the motorists from hacking thousands of miles away. It could be by the auto company. It could be by a rogue operation. It could be by anybody in the world and they can hack models at a time. In other words, it's the same Toyota model. They could start spinning these cars out of control in the thousands. And technical conferences where I've been at, that's one thing they never want to talk about. What about hacking? It's like the nuclear power industry. What are you going to do with nuclear wastes for 250,000 years; where are you going to put it? Anyway, we're running short of time. I want you to talk a bit about the rear-seat safety and for people who don't have cars that use Uber or Lyft, tell us about that.

Jason Levine: Sure. This is something that doesn't get nearly enough attention. But the back of our passenger cars have not really been considered as part of the important advancements in our safety conversations for a long period of time. And traditionally the reason for this, at least that the industry and the government have given is, well most

Americans are driving either by themselves or they're driving with one passenger in the car. Now there's about 2,000 people every year who are dying in crashes in the back of passenger vehicles. And that could be a car or a light truck. So it's not an insignificant number. That's a lot of people every year and many, many more are seriously injured. So, one of the things we've always fought for at the Center for Auto Safety, as you know, is improving back-seat safety. But now more than ever, what we're seeing is a rise in what used to be thought of as a commuter car being used commercially. And when we say that, we're talking about Uber or Lyft or Via or any of the other ridesharing companies that are out there where you have an individual who purchased a car that they normally use just for themselves and maybe a spouse or somebody like that, and now they are every day putting a passenger in the rear seat of that vehicle. Now things that don't exist in the rear seat of that vehicle are good seat standards in terms of that rear seat. If there's a crash, the rear seat standard hasn't been updated since 1972. There's no warning or alarm in the back for you to put a seatbelt on as there is in the front even though NHTSA has been required by Congress to write a rule to require exactly that sort of alarm. There's no airbags in the back of most vehicles. There is no crash dummy test that's specifically set up for rear-occupant protection. So, we're in the process of putting together a campaign around really increasing rear-seat safety for passengers, which has always been an issue, but is ever more of an issue now. We've got a lot of people riding on the backseat of cars that no one's ever really thought about that increase in the past.

Ralph Nader: I know some of our listeners, they're saying what about this Takata airbag disaster. The airbag defect recalls are now well over 20 million cars and they can't recall them fast enough because they got to get the suppliers to get the substitute airbags ramped up and they don't have that many suppliers. What about somebody listening who got a Takata recall; give them the latest on all that.

Jason Levine: The first and most important thing is there's a lot of people, literally millions out there who are frustrated that they've received some sort of notice that their vehicle is subject to the Takata inflator recall and they weren't able to get it. So we continue to urge people who are in that situation, continue to call your dealer and any other dealer of your vehicle. So you have a Toyota, you don't just call your dealer. If they're saying they don't have the parts, call the dealer the next town over because any dealer of your Toyota should be able to replace that airbag. And if they say call back in a month, make sure you call back in a month. Don't forget. Because as you said, Ralph, there are supply issues that have slowed down this process but more and more should be coming online. Unfortunately, the reality is there are still 25 million airbags that need to be replaced. And sometimes, it's just people aren't taking the time to do it, but a lot of times, it's the manufacturers have not reached every person who has one of these airbags. So we really encourage you, if you're not sure if you had your airbag replaced, if you bought a used car and you don't know if it was replaced, go to safercar.gov, which is where NHTSA has their website and then also call your dealer and see if you can get it replaced because these are ticking time bombs.

Ralph Nader: There are very few people, listeners, working full-time to make sure the

government enforces your auto safety laws and Jason Levine is one of them. Thank you very much.

Jason Levine: Thank you so much for having me.

Steve Skrovan: We have been speaking with Jason Levine, Executive Director of the Center for Auto Safety. We will link to the Center for Auto Safety at ralphnaderradiohour.com. I want to thank our guests again today, Lois Gibbs and Jason Levine. 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: For Ralph's weekly column, it's free, go to nader.org. For more from Russell Mokhiber, go to corporatecrimereporter.com.

Steve Skrovan: And if you haven't heard by now, where have you been? Ralph has got two new books out--the fable, *How the Rats Re-Formed the Congress*. To acquire a copy of that, go to ratsreformcongress.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: Join us next week on the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour* when we welcome back another legendary progressive champion, Noam Chomsky. I think people are going to tune in to that. Thank you, Ralph.

Ralph Nader: Thank you, everybody. It's all about changing our routine, leaving space and time for our civic engagement. That's the future.