

RALPH NADER RADIO HOUR EPISODE 494 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.

Steve Skrovan: Hope you're doing well today. And we have the man of the hour, Ralph Nader. Hello, Ralph.

Ralph Nader: Hello, everybody. This is real practical, right down to your neighborhood, this program.

Steve Skrovan: Today we're going to discuss what makes democracy work, why is American democracy in crisis, and what can we do about it? Those questions are at the core of the new film, *Join or Die*. Our first guest today will be civic advocate and co-director of *Join or Die*, Pete Davis, who firmly believes that grassroots community building is at the heart of saving our larger democracy. We'll discuss the role of clubs in American life, the relationship between club membership and effective government, the declining role of membership organizations in civic life since the 1950s, and how we can reverse that trend.

In the second half of the program, we'll welcome George Washington University Professor Scott Sklar. Professor Sklar is an expert on sustainable infrastructure, and he'll join us to talk about one of the easiest ways we can reduce our energy consumption and slow down the pace of our overheating planet—white roofs. Well, not just white roofs. We have all sorts of passive cooling technologies at our disposal, and we look forward to hearing from Professor Sklar about all those options.

Then, to close the show, Ralph has some choice words about the media's coverage of the Republican presidential campaign and how we tend to ignore Labor Day. And on the topic of labor, Steve gives us the latest on the ongoing Writers Guild strike. As always, somewhere in the middle, we'll check in with our relentless corporate crime reporter, Russell Mokhiber. But first, Pete Davis joins us to discuss the rise and fall, and rise and fall, and rise and fall of civic engagement in the US. David?

David Feldman: Pete Davis is a writer and civic advocate. He is the author of *Dedicated: The Case for Commitment in An Age of Infinite Browsing*.” He's the co-founder of the Democracy Policy Network, a policy organization focused on raising up ideas that deepen democracy, and co-director, with Rebecca Davis, of the film *Join or Die*. Welcome back to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*, Pete Davis.

Pete Davis: So glad to be here. Thank you.

Ralph Nader: Well, this is a documentary produced and directed by brother and sister, right? Rebecca is your sister?

Pete Davis: Yes, a five-year project of a family film.

Ralph Nader: And it's 99 minutes long, came out this year, and it's called *Join or Die*. Why the title?

Pete Davis: Well, the message of the film is about community in America. And very specifically, it's about the connection between joining up in local community and ordinary civic action and its connection to a thriving democracy. We wanted to use that old American phrase from Ben Franklin, "join or die," to show the stakes of what happens when we lose the quality in this country of being a nation of joiners. Our country is going to be in big trouble if we don't learn how to be joiners again.

Ralph Nader: Okay. Some of the examples you give of good joiner groups are the Odd Fellows #80 out of Texas, an old, federated society chapter bucking declining trends of people joining local organizations in the community. There's Red Bike & Green, Atlanta, Georgia, a black urban cycling collective, bicycles; Plainsong Farm & Ministry, Rockford, Michigan, an Episcopal church on a farm; Bowl Portland, Portland, Maine, a thriving modern bowling league; CIELO, Los Angeles, an indigenous mutual aid and advocacy group; Chicago Gig Alliance out of Chicago, rideshare drives coming together to fight for better working conditions.

We've discussed before, Pete—listeners should know Pete went to Harvard Law School and shook the place up with a report called the "Our Bicentennial Crisis" referring to Harvard Law School, where most of the graduates are directed or incentivized to go into corporate law firms instead of public interest law. And we talked about the difference between charity and justice. Most of these groups are either social organizations, people getting together and doing whatever they do in the community, or they're service organizations. They would mostly come under the rubric of charity. They're not challenging corporate power. They're not challenging the indentured strata of government—county, city, state, national—to corporate control. So you want to clarify the limits of this documentary so that we don't talk about the documentary I would have liked you to make, but the one you and your sister Rebecca made.

Pete Davis: Well, ever since Alexis de Tocqueville wrote about this centuries ago, and what folks like about what Robert Putnam and Theda Skocpol have written about more recently, is that the basic muscles of joining start often not necessarily with explicitly political work. One of the things we've seen is there's been a decline by half in the amount of people that have attended any meeting. There's been a huge decline in the last decades of people who have taken leadership roles in any organization. There's been a huge decline in the amount of people that say they have five friends, and a huge increase in the amount of people that say they have zero friends.

Therefore, these real basic atomic-level skills that eventually flourish into hardcore political action often start with softer civic organizing. As you saw at the turn of the century, there were Odd Fellows lodges and Masonic lodges and Elks clubs, that would maybe be about meeting up with

your friends and having dinner together, but they'd eventually be the place to start talking about town problems together.

Ralph Nader: Because they're people who know each other to begin with.

Pete Davis: Yes, and the reason why we wanted to start with ordinary civic life, not necessarily just hardcore political action that you're always speaking of, Ralph, is that especially people in my generation, really have to start with the basics. The amount of people who are—43% of Americans are part of zero organizations and another 20% are only part of one organization. So we're talking about two-thirds of the country that are not part of anything. They don't know how to run a meeting; they don't know how to do an invitation; they don't know how to deal with tension inside of neighbors; and they don't know how to plan something together in public.

Sometimes a bike collective or an immigrant mutual aid organization, or as you start getting more hardcore—into a congregation that does political work or rideshare riders that are forming a proto union among Lyft drivers—that starting with these basics of just joining is the first layer people need to get used to. And then out of that, start come the action.

Ralph Nader: You're fighting with the Internet gulag and the suction of people away from interpersonal community meetings into looking at screens at their iPhone and tablet. With that as a background, because I think that's really a cause of the suction out of interpersonal community groups at the neighborhood level, give us the figures you have in your report under the title *Shocking Social Science Data* spotlighted in your documentary *Join or Die*. You have six or seven declines, so give us the summaries.

Pete Davis: Yeah. We've had at least a 40%, probably more, decline since the '70s of people who've even attended one public meeting. We've had a 50% decline since the '70s of people who've taken any leadership role in any organization. When it comes to religious membership, which makes up organized religion, which is not for everyone, but it used to make up 50% of community organizing, and it has a huge history in politics and justice work. We've recently crossed the line into less than 50% of people are members of a congregation, when that used to be up at 90% mid-century. 50% decline when they do time diary studies, where the Census Bureau literally asks people to keep track of what you're doing each hour throughout the week. We're spending 50% less time with our neighbors at meetings. There's a 66% decline in union membership since the '60s.

Even on really soft stuff, like between the '70s and the '90s, there was a 60% decline in the amount of picnics Americans attended annually—everything from the goofiest way we get together in picnics and card games and meeting up at bars to really serious stuff like unions, congregations, and political work—the muscles are atrophying.

Ralph Nader: What do you attribute this to? How many factors? What?

Pete Davis: There are a few interesting things. One in the big study that we feature in the movie, which is the *Bowling Alone* study that Robert Putnam did in the '90s, are all these tiny things you could say contribute to it like suburban sprawl; there might be a little bit of women in the workplace where because there's two parent families working/two income families working, more time is

spent at work. The biggest one he found was television, because he was doing this study before the Internet even took off. And he found all these interesting things. For example, when television would first come to a town, you'd suddenly start seeing declines in civic life. And there's a lot of writing from the original critiques of television to Neal Postman in the '80s and '90s, so we have extreme versions of television in our pockets, interactive, sucking up all of our time with screen time, which is a huge part of it.

The biggest, interesting find that Putnam also discovered was a real generational story here; there's something happening wherein the civic culture is not passing from generation to generation. People who are in their 90s now are as civic as they were 50 years ago. People who are in their 70s are a little less civic than them; people in their 50s a little less civic than them; people in their 30s a little less civic than them. But the generations are not going down themselves in their civics, but with each successive generation, civic culture is declining. So he found through his studies there's something happening.

We all have our own theories of what's contributing to this. You've written and spoken so articulately about it, Ralph. In the movie, we have Jane McAlevey, the great labor organizer talking about a concerted effort in the '70s and '80s to promote individualism as the highest ideal. And the message interests people who were bothered by the labor movement, the women's movement, the civil rights movement, and the consumer movement. The strong message was to tell you that you're not all in this together, so you shouldn't have solidarity. Promotion of a culture saying, joining is not what you want to do; you want to be in it for yourself. So, there's a cultural story, too.

Ralph Nader: Well, we've spent a lot of time on this program over the years, as Steve and David and Hannah know, on the massive corporate penetration of our citizenry all the way down to undermining parental rights, selling direct hours of the day to kids as young as three and four, five, eight, undermining parental authority, drawing them away in entertainment, undermining worker rights, dealing with obstruction to justice, access to the courts, fine-print contracts. You can't negotiate anymore with big companies like you did with a local store. The tax burden has shifted away from the rich and powerful. More money in campaigns, restricting civic leaders who come out of communities because they don't have major money to run for office. More concentration of the media. Much more use of pharmaceuticals with people that disrupts life even right down to dispensary in elementary school; overmedication it's called. And of course, the diminution of news results in not hearing, reading about or seeing civic and community activity anymore. Local newspapers and weeklies are shutting down. How much of this can you attribute to corporate power?

Pete Davis: That's a huge part of the story. One of the things we talk about in the film, and a lot of people in community building space talk about, is the importance of what are called third spaces. This is just one corner of it. If the first space is your home and the second space is your work, third space is a place out in the community that you can hang out in.

In the mid-century, at the peak of American civic life, a lot of third spaces were public common spaces. There were so many buildings in your average town that were owned by civic groups. There were huge palaces of the people, labeled such by author/sociologist Eric Klineberg, referring to the beautiful libraries, plazas, and community centers we build. But now, one of the great

tragedies is when people talk about examples of third spaces, they say Starbucks. So even the idea that the people who would set our community spaces are either Starbucks or McDonald's that are saying, "You should have your meeting here," or corporate real estate developers that are buying up parts of town and owning the public space in the town. That's a huge part of it.

That's just on one corner of community building, let alone all the union busting that corporations are doing, as well as the growth of the work week, and the fact that people aren't given the space to do the community work. And media, as you point out all the time, corporations are raising you corporate instead of raising you civic. This all contributes to the decline of community.

Ralph Nader: While looking over the people you interviewed and who funded this, I was quite surprised. Maybe you couldn't have done it without the funding of the Lilly Endowment or the Alfred Sloan Foundation, that's the drug company money, and General Motors money years ago, as well as the Phyllis & Jerome Lyle Rappaport Foundation. But you interview Hillary Clinton, a war criminal, full support of the destruction, criminal war in Iraq by Bush and Cheney and toppling the Libyan regime against the opposition of Defense Secretary Gates, who persuaded Obama to do it. You interview Senator Mike Lee, a bizarre type of conservative Senator, David Brooks, who has written a thousand columns without talking about corporate crime, fraud, abuse, and domination, He talks in generalities and literary illusions and philosophical illusions.

I don't see any of the kind of civic advocates that you have been associated with and worked with over the years recognized, like Joel Rogers, for example, professor of law at University of Wisconsin, very close to the labor movement. You had to obviously make some compromises here. Could you explain?

Pete Davis: We wanted to focus on two parts of the movie. One was to tell the story of the social science discovery, which was Robert Putnam's journey associated with his famous study in Italy called *Making Democracy Work*, which is a rigorous study showing that ordinary civic action is connected to government flourishing. He invested twenty years studying different regional governments in Italy, trying to find the causal link of what makes democracy work. His conclusion was ordinary civic action as the key. The second was to cover his *Bowling Alone* study, which is about the most rigorous account of the decline of ordinary civic life in America featuring Washington civic groups versus civic life out in the country. He specifically addresses that, he and Theda Skocpol, who wrote a great book on this, *Diminished Democracy*, which focuses, not necessarily on what was going on in Washington or what was going on among activist lawyers and advocates, but on the amount of people that were part of participatory membership organizations in towns and cities across the country.

We wanted to tell the story of his rise. And that figures into the politicians that have interacted with him in his life. We also wanted to tell a story about the next generation of civic scholars, which is why we were so excited to feature three—Jane McAlevey, the amazing SEIU 1128 labor organizer, who has authored books with practical tips of how to do labor organizing, Priya Parker, who wrote *The Art of Gathering*, which is about on-the-ground practical tips for bringing people together, and Eddie Glaude Jr., who is a great leftist in national politics today. He spoke about stories of corporations, like if you're working 60 hours a week, if your wages are going down over the years, how are you going to have time for an active civic life? And so he talks in the film about

the political economy of civic life. We wanted to have a balance of people who were part of Bob's world and people that constitute the new generation of civic organizers.

Ralph Nader: It is puzzling that Putnam really does not focus enough on corporate domination. Like in our hometown in Connecticut, when we had a lot of small family-owned businesses, they were active. They went to town meetings. Now it's overwhelmingly changed. They can be still family-run, but they're dominated by the chains—McDonald's, Burger Chef, and Dunkin' Donuts and so on, with these fine-print contracts tying them up, in effect saying, "Shut up, don't get involved in any controversial local issues."

Why do you think he avoided it? We've had a corporate crime wave in this country. We've had all kinds of exposés in newspapers that Putnam reads—the *Washington Post*, *New York Times*, Associated Press, *Wall Street Journal*, *Boston Globe*. Why do you think he didn't pay attention to that? He's supposed to be an empirical data gatherer.

Pete Davis: The political economy of civic life, i.e., what is the relationship between the structure of our economy and how that affects ordinary neighborhood gathering. He touches a bit on this huge story with labor unions. He touches on it a bit with working time. But I agree that he doesn't focus on corporate crime.

That's why I'm really excited by people like Stacy Mitchell at the Institute for Local Self-Reliance and the folks fighting the antimonopoly fight today. For listeners, what they point out is that so much of the antimonopoly fight used to be about the consumer welfare standard, such as, are we just getting cheaper prices out of these monopolies? And what is so great about people like Stacy Mitchell, Matt Stoller and others who have fought, and as you have talked about for decades, what is the cultural aspect to this? It's not just about cheap prices. It's not just about wages and labor. It's also about what culture do we have as a country when a bunch of small businesses—that are sponsoring Little Leagues, that are creating an abundance of different leaders in towns to be involved in something, people that actually know their own workers, their own neighbors—are replaced by a bunch of chains in towns. How does that affect not just the economy of the towns, but the civic culture of towns.

Ralph Nader: The total domination, Pete, of the culture by commercialism, everything is for sale. There used to be commercial-free zones in this country where corporations didn't dare undermine parental authority and sell bad stuff—junk food, junk drink, sugar, fat—to kids directly, plus violent programming. There used to be commercial-free zones in other areas as well. They weren't predatory on the public schools the way now they want to take over and privatize them. They never dared challenge the post office. Now these big corporations want to corporatize the U.S. postal service.

And it's important for Putnam to be spoken to very candidly, because I think he's been overwhelmed with praise by all sectors and he's pulling his punches on the empirical reality of what's going on to block democratic activity, neighborhood activity, community activity, political activity at the grassroots, control of the two-party duopoly by big money, freezing out third parties and independent candidates. You know all of this.

You've laid the groundwork now. You have a credibility with this documentary, *Join or Die*, and you can move it to the next stage, because if Putnam wants to put out the fires of anti-Democratic trends, he's got to look at the flamethrowers. He can't ignore the flamethrowers in the background. Please tell our listeners how they can see this documentary and the phone numbers and the contacts.

Pete Davis: In the spirit of the movie being all about community and getting together in person, we are currently on a community screening tour, where hopefully before we go on a streaming channel next year, where it can be watched alone, this year we want you watch this film together. So if you go to joinordie.film, you can use a form on our website to bring the movie to your community.

We have congregations and clubs and universities and public health centers, and even political groups and unions have brought it to be a discussion point to jumpstart a conversation in your community about the importance of ordinary civic life and community engagement. So joinordie.film is the website, and there's a form right there you can easily fill out, and we can work with you to bring it to your community.

Ralph Nader: Unfortunately, we're running out of time, Pete. We're talking to Pete Davis, the co-director with his sister Rebecca. The title is *Join or Die*. It comes from Benjamin Franklin. Subtext has it, "A film about why you should join a club—and why the fate of America depends on it". Give the contact numbers once again slowly, how people can get this film or see this, including the trailer.

Pete Davis: If you want to see the trailer, go to trailer.joinordie.film. Three-minute summary of the film that pretty much shows you what you're going to see. And then if you want to sign up to bring it to your community, fill out our form at joinordie.film. And that's the website for this.

Ralph Nader: Thank you very much, Pete.

Pete Davis: Thank you.

Steve Skrovan: We've been speaking with Pete Davis. We will link to his work at ralphnaderradiohour.com. Up next, are we building roofs wrong? The short answer is yes. We'll be back for the long answer after we check in with our corporate crime reporter, Russell Mokhiber.

Russell Mokhiber: From the National Press Building in Washington, D.C., this is your *Corporate Crime Reporter* "Morning Minute" for Friday, August 25, 2023. I'm Russell Mokhiber.

Trader Joe's is recalling a type of cracker because the crackers might contain metal, marking the second significant recall the grocer has made in recent weeks because of foreign objects in their food. That's according to a report from CNN. The company said it was recalling its multigrain crackers with sunflower and flaxseeds due to possible metal contamination. "No injuries have been reported to date and all potentially affected product has been removed from sale and destroyed," the company said in a statement. Affected customers are told to discard the boxes or return them

to Trader Joe's for a full refund. Trader Joe's recently issued recall for two types of cookies because they might contain rocks.

For the *Corporate Crime Reporter*, I'm Russell Mokhiber.

Steve Skrovan: Thank you, Russell. Welcome back to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*. I'm Steve Skrovan, along with David Feldman, Hannah Feldman, and Ralph. Some of our solutions to the climate crisis demand worldwide systemic changes. Others are quite simple, like repainting our roofs. David?

David Feldman: Scott Sklar is Energy Director of George Washington University's Environment & Energy Management Institute, and Director of George Washington's Solar Institute. Mr. Sklar is an expert on renewable energy, energy efficiency, and sustainable infrastructure. Welcome to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*, Scott Sklar.

Scott Sklar: Great to be here. Thanks for letting me on.

Ralph Nader: Before we get into the subject of what white paint can do to reflect heat back into the stratosphere, Scott—and it's so good to talk with you, we've known each other for a long time—the news of the day is that Ocean City residents, not all of them, are vigorously opposing the proposed wind turbines in the ocean off Ocean City. And they've gone even further. They're contacting people all the way up the coast in New England to mobilize opposition to wind turbines everywhere. This is a real surprise. I can see where they might want some relocation. What's going on here? Is somebody behind them or is this lack of information?

Scott Sklar: Well, it's both, Ralph. It's lack of information but also, believe it or not, the hands of the oil industry are behind this. The first things that were happening were that whales wound up dying off the New Jersey coast, and there was a big rush to blame offshore wind turbines. And I was interviewed by the media quite a bit on this and I said, well, the first real problem is there were no offshore wind turbines, so they obviously weren't killed by them, nor were the approaches to map the ocean. They weren't using what the miners used to echo kinds of radar. And I said, and frankly, whales don't bump into stationary things. 95% of all whales are killed by ships, and 90% of all those ships are oil tankers. So that's what is the game here.

The oil industry was trying to slap at the wind guys to get the spotlight off themselves. The other issue is the visuality. If you look off the shore at these offshore wind turbines, they would be the size of a sugar packet turned on its side, so you could see them. They won't be huge. They wouldn't be larger, in fact, than most of the ships that you see on the water but also magnified.

What I say to everybody about zeroing out carbon and nuclear, is that you have to have a lot of renewables, and having renewables offshore is probably one of the best things you could do. It's the lowest cost and absolutely reliable giving us the gigawatts we need before the planet climate collapses. So that's my response.

Ralph Nader: Let's get to the white paint issue. This is very encouraging. Of course, people in North Africa have known this for years, and in other parts of the Middle East, where they paint

their building structures white. Casablanca means white home. Because they've known that it cools down what could be an insufferably hot area where they live every day.

So in the news recently, a professor of mechanical engineering at Purdue University, Professor Xiulin Ruan, was working with different kinds of paints, and he stumbled on a formulation where now he claims with some credibility that if you painted the roof of your home or apartment building with that kind of paint, it would increase the reflection of the sunlight back up to 98%. And if that's done all over the world, it would give quite a bit of time for the conversion away from fossils and nuclear to renewable and conservation of energy to take deeper hold over the planet's human energy needs.

Can you explain this white paint? I first learned about it, Scott, from my friend Art Rosenfeld, who was Mr. Conservation.

Scott Sklar: Sure.

Ralph Nader: Yeah. People in California are benefiting every day from his energy conservation work when he was a state official. And then he was called to Washington, the Department of Energy, to do the same thing, and he made a big deal out of white paint. So can you inform our listeners about what's the status here and how quantitatively significant can it be?

Scott Sklar: Okay. Art had been an old and dear friend and colleague of mine. I want to start by framing the conversation that in the 2020s, we have lots of different approaches to reflect heat out of a building. We have thermal barrier paint. We have reflective coatings, and white paint is part of that. We have Low-e coatings on windows. We have mechanical devices that pull heat out of buildings. So we have a huge set of options. Even if you just use the white paint, the high reflective white paint, or even the most ceramic reflective white paints that I use in the renewable projects, you can reflect about 30% to 40% of the sunlight out of the building, which reduces your air conditioning bills by 20% or 30%, so they're cost-effective. They make sense.

What this professor did is say, can we maximize the reflection of the heat, the subset of rays that come from the sun that are just related to heat—which is exactly what Low-e coatings do in windows—but maximize it on roofs. And that's what he has done successfully. Again, we have some issues on how we can scale that up and what materials really work, but the endpoint is the right point and the approach is the right approach. We need lots of low-cost, simple ways to reduce our energy use quickly to affect the impacts of climate change that we're beginning to really get a hard dose of.

Ralph Nader: Do you have any data on how many homes, apartment buildings, and business buildings have white roofs?

Scott Sklar: That's a good question. We have about 10,000 buildings out of basically a half a million buildings that have pure white roofs. And we have another 25,000 that have not pure white roofs, but light roofs that reflect some of the heat off. We have a very small percentage. And even I live in a bedroom community of Washington, D.C., Arlington County, and when my neighbors

are looking at roofs, I say, pick the lightest shingles you can get. White is preferable, but even the lightest gray or lightest brown reflects out.

And we need building codes to do this. We need community activists to do this. We need to train roofers and builders to do this. And we need to create a social compact that this is very easy to do. With this and things like tree canopy, we can reduce the heat on the ground, which will save lives, make people healthier, and use less energy. And that's really the end goal.

Ralph Nader: Isn't California leading the way in its code of new construction requiring something like this?

Scott Sklar: California, no question, is the lead, but I have to say there are some great programs in Arizona, New Mexico, and Nevada. All those states are dealing with record-high heat and are experiencing it and having to set up cooling centers if the grid goes down so people don't die in their homes and businesses. We need to focus this even more obviously elsewhere, but even more in those four states as well.

Ralph Nader: What's going on in Congress on this? Congress passed two bills. One in December 2021, called the Infrastructure Bill, and one in August 2022, the Inflation Reduction Act. And both laws have incentives for federal procurement—remember, the US government is the largest owner of buildings in the world and the largest user of energy in the world. By the way, everybody who pays taxes pays for that energy bill. The Feds have lots of options they can employ to step into this problem, and they are beginning to seriously do that. Primarily in the Inflation Reduction Act, there are also energy efficiency incentives, and building envelope issues can be addressed in it. But remember, it goes through the states and local governments. So to what you asked originally, Ralph, we need to get the local governments really focused on what they can do.

In my local government area, we have solar co-ops to buy solar. We're starting to see solar heat pumps cut air conditioning costs in half. Wouldn't it be great to have reflective roof co-ops so that anybody who's thinking of renovating or building, generally all you're doing is joint buying, so the purchase price is less; you get your equipment at lower cost and higher quality. We need to do things like that, which is why your show is so important.

Ralph Nader: You practice what you preach. Your home is solarized. Describe the other building you work in. Is it also solarized. And are you saving money?

Scott Sklar: Yes. And of course, we had a giant windstorm here a couple of weeks ago where winds were over 70 miles an hour, knocking out power lines and trees. And my two buildings were totally operational. I had people leaving their medicines in my refrigerator and charging their cell phones on my dining room table.

But yes, I have two buildings where I give weekly tours, mostly engineers and architects and professors and students, but also others. And my back-office building is a small two-story office building with R-50 insulation, super insulated windows, with solar daylighting that brings in natural light without the heat, full spectrum light, a solar battery system, and wind also with a small wind turbine, and a small hydrogen fuel cell. And that runs the two-story building without any

electricity. So it's 100%; it's a zero-energy buildings; not that it uses zero energy, but it takes no energy from the electric grid. And that's my office building.

My home on the same piece of property has R-38 insulation, has double-pane argon-filled windows with Low-e coatings, (Low-e is what reflects the heat rays of the sun off the windows), thermal barrier paint sprayed under the attic roof. It actually acts like a white roof in that it just reflects the heat waves back out. And of course, all LED lights and Energy Star, the most efficient appliances, a solar water heater, and a geothermal direct exchange heat pump. So I use 67% less electricity, heating and cooling my house than any other technology. And then finally, photovoltaics, multi types of photovoltaic panels, so I can show people their options, in a very large battery bank.

In this building, I have so many batteries, I joke that the sun could be stolen tomorrow and my daughter could throw parties in my house every day for a month. It's a huge amount of storage. And I bought an electric car last year, and added some more solar panels so the electric car is now 100% powered by solar energy.

Ralph Nader: We're talking with Scott Sklar, longtime solar energy advocate and practitioner. Listeners may be excited enough to want to know how to contact you. Can you give them a website?

Scott Sklar: Yes. It's under my company name. The stellagroupltd.com. I also have a website through George Washington University, and that's www.gwueemi.edu. I'm happy for people to email me. Because I'm so old, I am at solarsklar@aol.com.

Ralph Nader: Now, the big question on the topic, Scott, is quantitative significance. And there is a stunning estimate made by Professor Jeremy Munday, a professor of Electrical and Computer Engineering at the University of California, Davis, who researches clean technology. And he said this—hard to believe, "If materials such as the Purdue Professor's ultra-white paint were to coat between 1% and 2% of the Earth's surface, that's between 1% and 2% of the Earth's surface, slightly more than half the size of the Sahara Desert, the planet would no longer absorb more heat than it was emitting, and global temperatures would stop rising." He admits there's side effects, wildlife, et cetera. But apart from that, can this be true?

Scott Sklar: Let's just say it could be a ballpark, but I do want to point out two other facts. The American Council for Energy-Efficient Economy, ACEEE, which is the efficiency think tank founded by Art Rosenfeld, said that we could reduce 50% of all greenhouse gas emissions within 30 years using energy efficiency, and at lower cost than any kind of electricity generation. So it's faster and lower cost than any time—you will save money reducing half our greenhouse emissions with energy efficiency, of which these reflective coatings are one of.

And then the other one is Lawrence Berkeley Labs, the federal Department of Energy lab based in California, did a study that shows that energy efficiency costs equate to about 2.1 cents to 3.3 cents a kilowatt hour, and most people in the United States are paying 8 to 20 cents a kilowatt hour. You would be spending less money to save energy and making money immediately when it pays back, some of which is from a half a year to two years. So these make sense.

Now, back to your question is yes, we need to do a lot of different things. The problem is it's cross-borders. Just as we're seeing what you raised, Ralph. In New Jersey, we have people pushing back for lots of different reasons. So as one who is a professor and a practitioner and a businessman in the field, I am pushing for these collaborative efforts where you get groups of communities that agree to something and then just work it and rev it up. That way you're teaching locally, you're acting locally, and you're building consensus.

Ralph Nader: The obvious 800-pound gorilla in the room is the contradiction where corporations in energy arenas make more money selling waste, which is overuse of energy, and consumers save money by the efficient use of energy. So it's a dead-on conflict between the two interests. And guess who has the most power in the country over government and media? So what Scott is saying is the more you realize what you personally can save, quite apart from what your community and world can save, the more powerful you have to become on 535 members of Congress, at least, in addition to your state legislatures and try to redress that terrible imbalance of power between the waste profiteers and the efficiency desires of consumers and families and homeowners etcetera.

Scott Sklar: Ralph, you are 100% correct on this. And I worked as an energy staffer during the oil embargoes in the 1970s, when the oil, coal, gas, utility and nuclear industries lobbied brutally against renewable energy, energy efficiency, Clean Air Act requirements against their energy resources, and later on climate change. And it's up to us to be the counterweight to that, and we need to do it. And the best way to do it is at the local level because that changes minds and those members of Congress respond when there's lots of community groups doing these kind of projects.

Ralph Nader: Hannah?

Hannah Feldman: Just a counterpoint. Black goes with everything.

David Feldman: I was thinking, even after Labor Day?

Hannah Feldman: It's slimming, it's chic, unless you're wearing [overlapping 00:43:58]

Scott Sklar: Hannah, I am fine and support black clothes. I have no problem. I just suggest to people, don't wear it in the middle of the summer. Wear the whites and lights for reflection. But in wintertime, wearing black makes good sense. So I will support you at least halfway, Hannah, on this one.

Hannah Feldman: For the record, that was a joke. That's for the radio, for people who will inevitably take me literally. But actually, to that point, painting everything white seems like such a simple, great idea. If I'm so enthusiastic and I want to just run out and get white paint and paint my house, my driveway, paint everything white, is that always a good idea? If I'm living at a certain latitude, is that a bad idea? Do you have any caveats?

Scott Sklar: Well, of course. First of all, not all coatings are safe. So painting your driveway white, I would think about that first on how it interacts with water and wildlife. But definitely, if you're rehabbing your house, or building a house or summer home, or working with your community on a new school or nursing home or multifamily homes, make sure that they put in

there not only energy efficiency, but white roofs and of course, Low-e coating windows and energy-efficient windows. That's a big thing you can do. Again, if you're repainting your house, I wouldn't go out and just do it. But if you're repainting your house, think of that again; the lightest colors reflect the most heat. It doesn't have to be pure white, but lighter is generally better.

And in my community, we're dealing with stormwater management, so with the driveways, we're encouraging permeable pavements, which is basically holes in whatever you're using so water can get down, and usually some rocks and sand underneath so it can filter down and not run into the street and pollute, in our area, the Chesapeake Bay, the country's largest inland estuary. And we're doing lighter color pavements at the same time as permeable pavements. All of that makes sense and all of it should be done together and all of that needs to be done at the community level. The new power is local communities and people working together for a common cause.

Ralph Nader: Well, we're out of time. Thank you very much, Scott, for your observations. And people who want to get more information about in topics that we only touched on in these last few minutes can go to what informative website?

Scott Sklar: Google George Washington University Solar Institute or George Washington University EEMI, which is the Environmental & Energy Management Institute, where we have lots of information. Or you can email me at solarsklar@aol.com. Since I'm a professor at four different kinds of courses, I have tons of information. Happy to share with you. I want to thank Ralph. I haven't spoken with you in about 40 years, but you're one of my heroes. And I want to thank everybody for being interested in this critical topic.

Ralph Nader: You're very welcome and you're very enlightening. And if we get any contradictory emails, we'll send them to you for a response.

Scott Sklar: Absolutely. Happy to do that.

Ralph Nader: Thank you very much, Scott Sklar, professor, solar energy advocate for decades, practicing what he preaches in his own home and adjacent buildings. Thank you very much, Scott.

Scott Sklar: Thank you all.

Steve Skrovan: We've been speaking with Scott Sklar. We'll link to his work at ralphnaderradiohour.com. Ralph, before we close, you have some political observations you want to share with us.

Ralph Nader: Well, now we've seen the first Republican Party presidential debate, and it's important to ask why the mainstream media is so narrowly focused. Here's the way they cover presidential candidates, especially the two parties.

When the announcement is made by a candidate, they give a summary, the pitch, the announcement speech, and then subsequently, they look at the polls and they look at the money. And if the money isn't coming in, the pollsters don't register very high polls. And if they can't get in the polls at visible levels, they don't raise much money. At the same time, the *New York Times* and *Washington*

Post have regular reports on all the candidates' fundraising month by month. And it's done in a context of highlighting the role of money in politics, but they don't go to the next stage. I'll give you an example. Asa Hutchinson, a former member of Congress, a moderate Republican, and former governor for several years of the state of Arkansas; he worked in the Department of Homeland Security, was number two deputy in the DEA agency in Washington and was a US attorney. He throws his hat in for the presidential Republican nomination, and he gets almost no press. He gets no press because he's not raising much money.

On the other hand, someone who people never heard of, 38-year-old Vivek Ramaswamy, who made a lot of money in some bio-drug industry initiatives, is spending a number of millions of dollars on his campaign. And he gets all kinds of coverage in the *Washington Post* and *New York Times*. He has some pretty outlandish positions. He praises Trump.

And there you are. There's the contradiction, isn't it? They bewail the role of money in their editorials. They report the money all the time, and then they don't admit that their coverage is skewed by who raises more money than someone else. So someone as experienced as Asa Hutchinson gets a fraction of the coverage that Ramaswamy has been getting.

The second point I'd like to make relates to upcoming Labor Day. I've often wondered why the Democrats, who claim they're for workers and labor unions, don't make more of Labor Day. Talk about declining engagement, there are hardly any Labor Day parades anymore. Vibrant Labor Day Parades used to be in all kinds of cities. Now there are very few left, and the turnout is much less. But there are all kinds of things the Democratic Party can do to bring workers together, to have news conferences where workers voice their concerns, highlight the necessary increase of minimum wage, labor law reform to facilitate forming unions against giant multinational corporations that are not unionized, and many other things like worker health and safety in the workplace, inadequate coverage by health insurance. They don't do any of that. They just go around their routine, shaking hands and telling the listeners who they are with a few slogans.

So it's a real huge missed opportunity. It's one reason why the Democrats are losing elections to the Republicans. They've lost contact with blue-collar everyday workers. It would be good if people were interested in one of the best labor autobiographies I've ever read by an unsung labor organizer and prolific writer hero whose name is Harry Kelber. He won the Callaway Award in his mid-90s. He lived to almost be 100, passed away a few years ago. He wrote an autobiography called *My 70 Years in the Labor Movement*, and he called out crooked or overly bureaucratic labor union leaders. He didn't play favorites. He was as honest as can be.

And if you want to read about what the labor movement used to be like in its best moments and what it can be like, read *My 70 Years in the Labor Movement*. You can actually get a few of the remaining copies by going to laboradvocate.org, and for \$30 including postage, you can get the book.

Steve Skrovan: Well, speaking of labor, Ralph, I'm on strike still as a member of the Writers Guild of America, and I can give you a little update on what's going on there if you'd like.

Ralph Nader: I'd like it very much because I'm on strike, too. I belong to the SAG-AFTRA labor union. I've been trying to help by assigning my modest royalties directly to the SAG-AFTRA Foundation, which is trying to help workers who don't make much money in this industry pay their bills. And I'm having a great deal of difficulty in signing over these royalties to the foundation. That was my modest way of contributing, since I'm not out there on the picket lines the way you are, Steve.

Steve Skrovan: Yeah. And there was a huge SAG rally at Disney that I attended yesterday, and there was an update last night. The companies put out a proposal that they had offered to the Writers Guild on August 11th, which is, as we're recording this, it's about a week and a half ago. And here's how the WGA responded. I just want to read the short little missive that'll encapsulate what's going on. "Dear members, after 102 days of being on strike and of AMPTP" —the organization that negotiates for the companies—"After AMPTP silence, the companies began to bargain with us on August 11th, presenting us for the first time with a counteroffer."

In the past, there were three issues that they didn't even bother to counter, which was AI, streaming residuals transparency, so we know how successful a show is, so we know what piece of the pie we deserve. And in the writers' case, this is a little bit different from the actors' demands—minimums in writers' rooms. That said, the WGA told us we responded to their counter at the beginning of last week and engaged in further discussions throughout the week.

"On Monday of this week, we received an invitation to meet with Bob Iger, Donna Langley, Ted Sarandos, David Zaslav, and Carol Lombardini."

They're all CEOs, except for Carol Lombardini, who is the lead negotiator for the AMPTP.

"The invitation was accompanied by a message that it was past time to end this strike and that the companies were ready to bargain a deal. We accepted that invitation and in good faith, met tonight in hopes that the companies were serious about getting the industry back to work. Instead, on the 113th day of the strike, and while SAG-AFTRA was walking the picket lines by our side, we were met with a lecture about how good their single and only counteroffer was. We explained all the ways in which their counters, limitations, and loopholes, and omissions failed to sufficiently protect writers from the existential threats that caused us to strike in the first place. We told them that a strike is price, and that price is an answer to all, and not just some of the problems they have created in the business. But this wasn't a meeting to make a deal. This was a meeting to get us to cave, which is why, not 20 minutes after we left the meeting, the AMPTP released its summary of their proposals. This was the company's plan from the beginning—not to bargain, but to jam us. It was their only strategy to bet that we will turn on each other. Tomorrow, we will send a more detailed description of the state of the negotiations, and we will see you all out in the picket line so that the companies continue to see what labor power looks like."

So that's the situation here.

Ralph Nader: I would also urge the range of impact by the unions to be broader, to focus the heat on, big investors in the entertainment industry—JPMorgan, BlackRock, and Apple.

Listeners should know this is not an ordinary strike for just higher wages and benefits. Many of these writers and actors are going to be exposed to losing their jobs entirely by artificial intelligence and other consolidations. So when Steve talks about the word existential, he is not exaggerating.

Steve Skrovan: I want to thank our guests again, Pete Davis and Scott Sklar. 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", featuring Francesco DeSantis and "In Case You Haven't Heard". A transcript of this program will appear on the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour* Substack site soon after the episode is posted.

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. Our associate producer is Hannah Feldman. Our Gofer Emeritus is John Richard. Our social media manager is Steven Wendt.

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

Ralph Nader: Thank you, everybody. Remember, try to become a Capitol Hill citizen. We'll talk more about it in future programs. But for now, you can learn about Capitol Hill citizenry by obtaining a copy of the latest edition of the *Capitol Hill Citizen* newspaper, 40 pages. Go to capitolhillcitizen.com and you'll get it back first-class mail, print-only.