

## **Ralph Nader Radio Hour**

### **Episode 517**

#### **“Mad As Hell”**

**February 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2024**

**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:** Morning.

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

**Ralph Nader:** Hello. Another non-replicable program for the listeners to listen to and react.

**Steve Skrovan:** Last week in our ongoing coverage of the genocide in Gaza, we focused on two grassroots groups. One inside Israel, called Standing Together; the other in the United States, called Jewish Voice for Peace. Today we're continuing that conversation with a third grassroots group.

Our first guest today will be Eva Borgwardt, the national spokesperson of the Jewish-American organization, IfNotNow. IfNotNow has dedicated itself to busting the myth that Palestinian rights and Jewish safety are mutually exclusive, and that those who perpetuate that myth ignore, quote, "The very real threat of antisemitism justify their anti-democratic agendas and silence dissent," unquote.

Then we're going to switch gears to focus on one of our favorite topics here on the Ralph Nader Radio Hour, the corporation. Dr. Ralph Estes is a certified public accountant, and he's here to talk about corporate accountability. Dr. Estes organized the Stakeholder Alliance, a national grassroots coalition to promote corporate accountability to stakeholders. And he's also the author of "Fight the Corpocracy, Take Back Democracy: A Mad As Hell Guide for the 99%". He calls it a strategy guide and toolkit, a Swiss Army knife, if you will, for the 99% activist. We look forward to breaking that all down with Dr. Estes.

As always, somewhere along the line, we'll check in with our trustee corporate crime reporter, Russell Mokhiber. But first, if not now, when? David?

**David Feldman:** Eva Borgwardt is the national spokesperson of the Jewish-American organization, IfNotNow. IfNotNow has dedicated itself to busting the myth that Palestinian rights

and Jewish safety are mutually exclusive. Welcome to the Ralph Nader Radio Hour, Eva Borgwardt.

**Eva Borgwardt:** Thanks so much for having me. Good to be with you.

**Ralph Nader:** Welcome indeed, Eva. Tell us where you got your name, IfNotNow, and how you all got started.

**Eva Borgwardt:** IfNotNow comes from Hillel's three questions. If I'm not for myself, who will be for me? If I'm only for myself, what am I? What, not who, as in it dehumanizes you to only be for yourself. And if not now, when? That the way that we hold care for ourselves and care for others together is by taking action in the present toward a more just world. So it seemed like the perfect name to encapsulate a movement that, as you mentioned, holds Jewish safety and Palestinian safety and mutual liberation together in taking action in the present.

And the movement was founded in 2014 in response to that assault on Gaza, Operation Protective Edge, in which dozens of Israelis and thousands of Palestinians were killed. And it was a moral outcry from a generation of young Jews who were frustrated by what they saw as the Jewish establishment's inaction and one-sided support for Operation Protective Edge.

And so they started protesting outside Jewish establishment organizations, the Anti-Defamation League, the American Jewish Committee, Jewish Federations, and launched a movement that has spread across the country in a generation rising up and saying, "If not now, when?"

**Ralph Nader:** Now, I know you work with Jewish Voice for Peace and other similar groups. How do you manage common pursuits together? For example, many of the groups are opposing the \$14.3 billion bill for weapons funding for Israel that is in the Congress now. Are you coordinating your effort against that? Do you work together or just have a healthy competition in pursuit of the same goals?

**Eva Borgwardt:** It's a really important question, and especially because we know that the right is, at least on the surface, very good at working together and coordinating and having a unified agenda of anti-trans hate, anti-critical race theory. Obviously, these things that they've sort of mutually fabricated and ballooned into issues, and the left in the past, especially, falls into traps of cutting each other down and being in competition.

And this moment has been one of overwhelming unity among different left and progressive groups in our area of overlap, which is that we need an immediate and urgent ceasefire now, as soon as possible. And the clarity of this moment of the necessity of saving lives and of winning a ceasefire, a de-escalation, a full everyone for everyone hostage exchange, and to stop this 14 billion in weapons funding that the US government is proposing sending to the Israeli government has resulted in an extremely unified front across the Palestinian rights movement, into progressive and liberal Jewish circles and movements that's then been able to lead the progressive movement more broadly.

We're seeing unions coming out. We're seeing other organizations on other issues coming out in support of a ceasefire. And it's a really powerful moment. And obviously, of course, there are differences, but we're seeing the power of unity in this moment in a really dramatic way.

**Ralph Nader:** Well, you're sounding the alarm to head off an even bigger war in the entire Middle East region. How do you confront the reality that the Democratic Party, led by Biden, and the Republican Party led by Trump, are on the same page? In fact, Trump is probably worse because he's favorite annexation of the Palestinian territories by the Israeli regime of Prime Minister Netanyahu. How do you deal with that, other than urging people to vote Green or vote some right-end candidate?

**Eva Borgwardt:** I'll start by saying I'm terrified of Donald Trump. I was a field organizer, boots on the ground, in Arizona in the 2020 election, where Biden won by around 10,000 votes, because I was terrified of the prospect of right-wing fascism and a president that was backed by this white nationalist, antisemitic base that was very much in the public eye and which had state power for four years, in which we really faced the prospect of them having state power again. And it's terrifying for Jews, for Muslims, for any marginalized community in the US.

So many people would be vulnerable and under existential threat under a Trump presidency. And so I'm very clear-eyed about that. And I'm furious with President Biden, who seems to be willing to risk that scenario by insisting on sending unconditional aid and unconditional diplomatic support for this assault on the Palestinian people in Gaza, led by Netanyahu's right-wing government, which Biden was previously holding at arm's length prior to October 7th because of Netanyahu's capitulation to the far-right ministers in his cabinet.

So Biden knows exactly who these people are and is still, at least prior to the last couple of weeks, honestly, was still having a posture of, we're sending you unconditional aid, we're blocking any real accountability for this horrific effort. And he's risking throwing the election to Trump over that. And it makes me and other young people and other young Jews furious.

And it also exposes the idea that this US support for this far-right Israeli government is at all about Jewish safety. It's not. And making American Jews vulnerable to a Trump presidency exposes that idea. Dragging the entire region into a broader regional war exposes that lie, that Jewish safety can somehow be secured by military domination over Palestinians and by Palestinian death. And it's an extremely dangerous falsehood. And we're seeing the shattering of that myth that has provided cover for US support for Israel for so long.

**Ralph Nader:** Meanwhile, the slaughter continues. How are you communicating to Americans about what's really going on over there? How do you go about doing it through meetings, rallies, events, protests? Give us an idea of what IfNotNow is doing.

**Eva Borgwardt:** Totally. There are several different avenues that we're using to show people what's happening.

And also, I'll say that many people have made this, including on this show, but the most immediate comparison is to the Iraq War, which I was too young to remember. But there's a key concept that's

happening, especially among young people, which is that you can't manufacture consent with a population that has social media and direct access to what Palestinians are experiencing. Young people especially, but anyone who's on social media can open up their phone and can watch videos that are being streamed from Gaza, where these incredibly brave young journalists are showing people exactly what's happening.

So we know that people's families are buried under the rubble. We're seeing kids carrying bodies of their siblings through the rubble where the rest of their family has been murdered. And the immediacy of that horrific situation is very, very clear for a much wider swath of the American public that has had access to that type of information before. We're not beholden to only mainstream news sources, and we can get the information right from them.

The other information that we can get is Israelis who are proudly broadcasting videos of young Israeli soldiers saying these genocidal slogans and celebrating deaths of Palestinians, which I'll speak for many young Jews, is really a shattering of everything that they had been taught about what Israel stands for.

So there's a real awakening that is happening right now based on things that we see before our eyes in terms of what's actually happening on the ground. And so in terms of getting that message out there beyond the people who are seeing that directly, we've been doing sit-ins in congressional offices, we've been doing massive rallies. We've been staging acts of civil disobedience, starting with blocking every single entrance to the White House just a week after the original attack and basically saying that there can't be business as usual while this is happening. And needing to get sort of more and more creative with those tactics, but basically saying that American Jews will not sit by as the US supports the bombing of Gaza.

This includes our members who are personally grieving, relatives and friends, who were Israeli relatives and friends, who were murdered on October 7th. And we're pushing through our grief to throw our bodies into acts of civil disobedience that say absolutely not, not in our name, this is not about our safety, and how dare you use Jewish safety and concern for American Jews as cover for the US supporting this Israeli government in absolutely destroying Gaza.

**Ralph Nader:** And of course, the stories keep getting worse. Are you getting any traction on Capitol Hill, which is very obstinately and unconditionally favoring for decades whatever any Israeli government does over there?

**Eva Borgwardt:** Yes. Two things are true at the same time, which is that we still don't have a ceasefire. A majority of representatives in Congress still oppose it. And that the majority of the American people have said that they want a ceasefire and certainly the overwhelming majority of Democrats, and we're not receiving that representation on Capitol Hill.

And simultaneously, the protests over the past several months have been extremely effective in moving an unprecedented swath of Democrats to come out and say, enough, and to recognize Palestinian humanity as valuable and important. And so the task now for the movement is to not give up and not accede to the most potent weapon that our opposition has against us at this point, which is despair, and demobilization, and demoralization, and a feeling of failure and grief. And

we need to do what we've been doing for the past several months and figure out new ways to do it, which is to continue taking action through our grief and not allow a new tolerance for this level of horror and death and destruction to demobilize our movements.

**Ralph Nader:** Who are some of your allies in Congress?

**Eva Borgwardt:** The two people that I immediately want to lift up are Rashida Tlaib and Cori Bush, who have been and have been forced to be the conscience of Congress since they arrived in Congress. And their colleagues have been outsourcing their morals to these two women leaders, and they came out with the Ceasefire Now Resolution. They were the ones to out the gate, say, all human life is precious, all Israeli life and all Palestinian life, and we cannot bomb our way to peace. And they said that at the beginning, and it still remains true. And more and more people are joining them.

And so there's a narrative that the media especially is interested in telling about how divisive this moment is. And again, as we were saying earlier, I really want to point to the amount of unity that what you have is a coalition led by Jews and Palestinians in the streets, and you have a Palestinian and black woman lawmakers who are leading this call for peace and for the sacredness of human life. And this is the uprising of a new anti-war movement. I really believe that this could be the uprising of a new anti-war movement in the US that is largely led by Palestinian, Jewish and black, mostly women and queer people who are saying, we refuse to be pitted against each other anymore, and how dare you try to pit our safety against each other because it's tied together.

**Ralph Nader:** What kind of opposition are you facing? Are you being smeared? Are you being censored on campus? Are you being denied access to public arenas? What kind of opposition are you incurring?

**Eva Borgwardt:** Well, what I think is really important, a really interesting, and I think relatively new dynamic that I want to point to is that increasingly, a lot of the opposition that's sort of most brutal and violent and vocal is from the far-right and from white nationalists, people like Marjorie Taylor Greene and people like Elise Stefanik, honestly, whose politics are pro-Israel but honestly antisemitic, and who are using this issue as a way to demonize Jewish and Palestinian activists and are very clearly allowing their antisemitism and Islamophobia to come out under the guise of standing up for Israel.

And some of the most violent and horrific things that we're hearing in the public discourse are from those types of people who don't see any of us as human, and who are just using concern for Israel as a moral cover for their racism, their antisemitism, their anti-Palestinian racism, and their Islamophobia.

**Ralph Nader:** There's been some pushback from Elise Stefanik's district in New York. Over 130 residents near the district or in the district have petitioned her to resign for her unconditional support of the genocide going on in Gaza and for her hypothetical manipulation of witnesses at a recent hearing. That's on Common Dreams and CounterPunch, if you want to get a copy of that.

Steve?

**Steve Skrovan:** Yeah. Eva, I want to take the opportunity to read a comment from a listener a couple of weeks ago on our program. We've devoted a lot of programs to this conflict, and this regular listener said this, and I just want you to respond to him because I responded to him to no avail.

He says, "My heart goes out to all the innocent people on both sides. However, it's not Israelis that kill Muslims because they're Muslims. There's plenty of Palestinians living and working in Israel. Hamas can end the war by releasing all the hostages, punishing planners and the attackers on October 7th. Palestinians can then form a new government in Palestine that does not have a charter that demands the killing of Jews."

So he's saying that Hamas is, in their charter, demands the killing of Jews and that they have the power to stop it if they just returned all the hostages and punished themselves for attacking Israel. How would you reply to that?

**Eva Borgwardt:** It's honestly uncontroversial to say that Hamas is an authoritarian organization that does not have the interests of the Palestinian people in mind and perpetuated a horrific attack on October 7th. None of that excuses what the Israeli government is doing to Palestinian people in Gaza right now. And it also doesn't excuse the ongoing status quo of endless occupation and apartheid that was present prior to October 7th, and which Netanyahu and his far-right government were cementing by normalizing relations with surrounding Arab countries, as well as deepening settlements and deepening occupation.

There was no end in sight for this. And then meanwhile, the Israeli government brutalized Palestinians when they tried to nonviolently resist. I mean, we saw the Great March of Return in 2018 when Palestinians walked the border and then were shot.

What our movements are saying is that a ceasefire needs to be accompanied by an actual political process that will secure freedom and safety for everyone. IfNotNow's principle is equality, justice, and a thriving future for all. That nobody on that land is going anywhere, nobody is going to be pushed into the sea, but the organizing principles of whatever regime ends up replacing what we have now needs to be that all human beings are fundamentally equal, and there also needs to be justice for past harm in order to secure a future where everyone can live in peace and freedom and dignity.

**Ralph Nader:** David?

**David Feldman:** Could you please expand on how right-wing antisemitism manifests itself through pro-Zionism?

**Eva Borgwardt:** I mean, there's two aspects to this. There's obviously the sort of evangelical theology, which I'm not an expert in, but which I understand to be, that Jews need to go to Israel and gather there. And then there's sort of an apocalyptic vision of the rapture in which all Jewish people in Israel need to either convert to Christianity or be killed in this apocalyptic vision. So support for Israel from that standpoint, obviously, is not at all in the interest of Jewish people.

And then there's the other piece, which is that from the beginning, there has been an extremely uneasy alliance between those Jews who supported the Zionist project in the form of a nation state in Israel-Palestine, and white Christian anti-Semites who don't want Jews in their countries, whether that be Britain or the US, and basically allowing these imperial powers to outsource their Jewish problem to this country in the Middle East, which then also functions as a sort of buffer zone for US imperial foreign policy.

And obviously, the historical throughline is more complicated, but that is a key part of this dynamic. And when we talk about Biden's support for Israel, we can't ignore either his own deep Zionism, which is essentially a Christian Zionism, and also, as you've spoken about on this podcast, the things that he's been saying for decades, which is that if there weren't an Israel, the US would need to create one, look at the rest of the region or to protect her interests in the region.

The first time I heard that quote was 2017. He's been saying it since 1986. And the unconditional support that comes out of that policy is not about Jews. It's about an extremely dangerous US foreign policy that for Jews who have relatives in Israel or loved ones in Palestine, places our loved ones at the center, and again, as a human buffer for US imperial interests in the region.

And so that's part of what we're resisting as this new unified anti-war movement saying, we will not be your buffer zone. We will not be the front lines of this imperial foreign policy anymore. We want a US foreign policy that includes Jewish liberation and Israeli liberation as part of a vision for the US role in a more just world.

And I honestly think that movement, there's so much to be grief-stricken and horrified and depressed about right now, but that movement, I honestly think, is extremely hopeful and powerful.

**Ralph Nader:** Eva, is IfNotNow also focusing on the munitions manufacturers who have every vested interest to persuade Congress to give more and more military aid to Israel, which comes back in the form of contracts to Lockheed Martin, Raytheon, Boeing and other munition manufacturers. They're all over Capitol Hill. Do you focus some attention on them in addition to the A.I.P.A.C. lobby?

**Eva Borgwardt:** Yes. Thank you so much for bringing them up. Obviously, they are a huge pillar of support for this unconditional US weapons funding to Israel. They benefit from it, obviously, and they are a huge, a huge aspect of why this is continuing.

We are part of a broader movement, and we haven't been really been doing direct actions on the weapons manufacturers themselves. Plenty of other people are, as they should be. And so our lane for now has been focusing on A.I.P.A.C., which partly is resonant for us as Jews. And we can do that because all of the parts of the movement are sort of working together or taking on different pillars of this picture and this opposition that is an alliance of Christian Zionists, imperial foreign policy makers, and weapons manufacturers, as well as organizations like A.I.P.A.C.

And the important thing is also that when we talk about it, and IfNotNow does this whenever we talk about A.I.P.A.C., is that we talk about A.I.P.A.C. as part of that larger constellation and that larger picture. It's really, really important. And thank you for bringing them up.

**Ralph Nader:** What if our listeners want to find out more information that you're distributing about your activities and want to support IfNotNow, can you give them your website slowly?

**Eva Borgwardt:** Folks who are interested in learning more or getting involved or supporting IfNotNow can go to [ifnotnowmovement.org](http://ifnotnowmovement.org).

**Ralph Nader:** Well, we've been speaking with Eva Borgwardt, who is the national spokesperson for the innovative and active IfNotNow organization, fighting for peace in the Middle East, and more immediately, a ceasefire, humanitarian aid into Gaza in accordance to the desperate needs, and a more accountable Congress and White House. Thank you very much, Eva.

**Eva Borgwardt:** Thank you so much for having me.

**Steve Skrovan:** We've been speaking with Eva Borgwardt. We will link to IfNotNow at [ralphnaderradiohour.com](http://ralphnaderradiohour.com). Up next, fight the corpocracy, and one of the ways we do that is by highlighting corporate crime 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, February 2, 2024. I'm Russell Mokhiber.

Trader Joe's is facing union busting charges before the National Labor Relations Board. The National Labor Relations Board's prosecutors have accused the company of illegally retaliating against workers, firing a union supporter and spreading false information in an effort to chill an ongoing organizing campaign. But in a hearing last week, a Trader Joe's attorney briefly summarized a sweeping defense it intends to mount against the charges that the NLRB itself is unconstitutional. That's according to a report in the Huffington Post. The argument would appear to fit inside a broader conservative effort to dismantle the NLRB, which has taken aim at agencies tasked with enforcing laws to protect workers.

For the corporate crime reporter, I'm Russell Mokhiber.

**Steve Skrovan:** Thank you, Russell. Welcome back to the Ralph Nader Radio Hour. I'm Steve Skrovan, along with David Feldman and Hannah and Ralph.

A lot of people are mad as hell, but I'm not sure why. Our next guest can give us some good reasons. David?

**David Feldman:** Dr. Ralph Estes is Emeritus professor of business and accounting at American University in Washington, D.C., co-founder and vice president of The Center for Advancement of Public Policy, and Emeritus Trustee at the Washington, D.C. Institute for Policy Studies. He is the author of several books, including "Tyranny of the Bottom Line: Why Corporations Make Good



People Do Bad Things" and "Fight the Corpocracy, Take Back Democracy: A Mad As Hell Guide for the 99%".

Welcome to the Ralph Nader Radio Hour, Ralph Estes.

**Ralph Estes:** Morning.

**Ralph Nader:** Welcome indeed, Ralph. Years ago we had more than a few exchanges when you were at American University in Washington. And the reason is that you are one of the great pioneers of social accounting, which is another way of saying that when you evaluate corporations' performance, you have to evaluate the damage they do, not just the services and products that they provide.

And I want listeners to listen to the words very carefully here. He came out with a book in the late 1990s called "Tyranny of the Bottom Line", as David just noted. I consider this book probably the most important book ever written on corporate power, the history of corporate evolution, and the damage it does to a whole variety of stakeholders, and what people can do about it with amazing detail, depending on whether you want to spend a few hours, a few days, a few weeks, or make a career for corporate accountability.

So it's all wrapped up here in the book, "Tyranny of the Bottom Line". You have a chapter called The Public Cost of Private Corporations. And this really was such a stunning evaluation. You make an elaborate list of the public costs of private corporations category by category. So explain how social accounting is different from corporate accounting.

**Ralph Estes:** Well, I wouldn't so much compare them one equal to the other. I would say that the original corporations were, as you noted, created to serve the public interest, and this was explicit in their charters. And in effect, Queen Elizabeth said, if you can do this and raise money from private investors to fund what you're doing in the public interest, that's okay, but it's just not your main purpose. That's gotten perverted over the years until that has become the main purpose, that is serving the interest of the funders, the stockholders.

I'd like to comment, if I may, about the original purpose of the corporation. It was to serve the public interest and always so understood up until the early 1800s. In other words, if you'd walked out on the street of, let's say, Philadelphia, in 1810, and you would say, I'm thinking about starting a corporation, I'm going to focus on making a profit for stockholders, people would have looked at you like you were nuts. That's not what corporations do. Corporations are to serve us. They build bridges, they create libraries, they create hospitals, they do things the public needs. And if they can find private investors to fund it, that's fine, but that's not their purpose.

Now, when we think about corporate performance today, everybody's mind goes to the profit and loss statement, the operating statement, the net profit, the return on investment. That is absolutely wrong. The corporate performance is how it serves the public purpose. There is no measure of that. There's no statement. There is no accounting for that.

If the purpose of the corporation had been sought in the original performance reports, it would have focused on all the good things the corporation does for society and all the bad things. And as we would have seen today, we'd find a lot of corporations running a big deficit in terms of the effect on the corporation.

So social accounting, as the term has been used, or corporate social accounting would require corporations to do a performance report that includes their damage to the environment, that includes the effect on customers who buy defective products, and the warranties aren't met. That includes the health and safety of communities and workers, includes the pay discrimination and gender and racial discrimination that takes place on a daily basis in the workplace. All of that would be captured and converted into dollars, because that's the only real measure that we can understand.

**Ralph Nader:** You also had the cost of crime and fraud, corporate crime and fraud, the cost of consumption of natural resources. Describe that one.

**Ralph Estes:** Well, a corporation comes onto a plot of land and says, "This looks good, let's buy this," so they buy it, and then they start drilling and pull out the oil that's underneath, and they pull out the ore, and they damage the surface so it's unusable, and they don't show any cost of any of that. They paid for the land. That's all they paid for.

And these are all public resources that have been effectively stolen under the law, because the law doesn't prohibit it in the United States throughout several centuries. And today, New Mexico is a very good example of this. We've got wealthy ranchers who are exploding [? 00:31:37] the farmland, the ranchland of eastern New Mexico, and destroying it for crops. We've got drilling that takes place in southeastern and northwestern New Mexico that's pulling out the natural resources that belong to the people. And, of course, we've got the Navajo and other reservations and the Pueblos that have had their societies and their culture overrun, and their schools, in the name of corporate profit. So these are all the public costs that corporations — some of the public cost that corporations impose.

**Ralph Nader:** And I just want to interject here. We're talking with the Professor Emeritus, Ralph Estes, that investors do not create corporations. They finance them. All corporations are created by the state. And that's often missed by the public.

In the description of private enterprise, it's viewed like it's sui generis. Someone figures out a thing to produce or a service, and goes around raising capital and starts a corporation. And what Ralph Estes is saying, the essence of the corporation, the reason why it's allowed to have limited liability for its shareholders, the reason why it has so many privileges and immunities, is because it was originally supposed to fulfill public purposes.

When corporations were chartered in Massachusetts in the early 1800s, they were put on a leash. They had to get renewed on good behavior by the legislature. Well, now it's executive branch agencies in the state governments that do it, and it's just automatic.

So Ralph is trying to bring back the history here, which has been widely abused to a level where these giant corporations astride the globe are now able to behave as governments in themselves, controlling governments, capital, labor, technology, pitting countries against one another, and so forth.

**Ralph Estes:** Now, if the secretary of state or the state legislature or a commission within the state were to call on every corporation that's chartered in that state to give an annual accounting on its serving the purpose for which it was created, the public purpose, and then when a corporation fell below the bottom line, that is, they had a deficit, their social cost exceeded their social benefits, the total cost exceeded the total benefits, there would be a real question as to whether they would be allowed to continue.

Of course, we don't do that, but I believe that in some states, it would be procedurally almost a simple matter for the secretary of state to say, from now on, I will not approve any corporate charter application that does not exist to serve the public interest. At any time a chartered corporation in this state is going beyond serving the public interest, causing a great deal of social damage, environmental damage, then that charter will be put in abeyance until they get straight or it will be canceled.

I think that all that power is in the states. The legislature can do it. Some states, the governor could initiate it. Some could just simply do by the secretary of state. And so if you're going to start action, listeners might want to focus their action on their local state, their local government, who the people are, and visit with them, and if possible, picket them and demonstrate to get them to exercise their authority and responsibility.

Because let me ask you this. Is there any member of a state government or a state legislature that would deny that all their actions are taken in the public interest? That's the only reason they're there, is to serve the public interest. They don't dare say, "Oh, no, I'm here to steal all the money I can." So they all have to give lip service to the notion of the public interest, and none of them are making that a reality. And that could be a big hammer in the part of citizens if they want to organize around that kind of requirement.

**Ralph Nader:** You also have a category called the Public Cost to Communities. Tell us something about that.

**Ralph Estes:** This brings up the "not in my backyard" phenomenon that is especially arising now with the episode of homelessness that is growing worldwide at an incredible pace. But that's another topic.

But people say, you don't want to put a homeless shelter in my backyard because these people are dirty and druggish and so forth, or you don't want to put this plant in my neighborhood because it'll create congestion. There's a big fight in Albuquerque about some small area of the city that's separately incorporated, welcoming in some development that's going to create congestion and bring in people. And we don't know who they're going to be, what they're going to be like. But, boy, I mean, the citizens are up in arms. They've defeated the mayor and so forth. So citizens know that a corporation's presence can impose great cost.

**Ralph Nader:** I know people may find what we're talking about incredulous, because the damage that they read about in these reports that come out from congressional committees, government agencies, civic organizations, very rarely have a price tag on it. We're being run into the ground by these corporate power players, and there are a lot of ways to hold them accountable with powerful election results, for example.

But your approach really reveals their Achilles' heel, because they like to talk dollars and cents. Okay, you talk dollars and cents, you just can't talk plus dollars without talking about the minus dollars. Corporate welfare shoveled out of Washington, subsidies, handouts, giveaways, bailouts, hundreds of billions of dollars a year. They don't show up as such on the corporate balance sheet. So we've got a lot of work to do.

But the handbook that Ralph Estes has produced is extremely useful for you listeners and your friends and relatives circle. It's very clearly written. Tell us a little bit about the tools that people can use. And they're not all great change tools, but a little here, a little there, alerting people, raising their demand levels, increasing their resistance to corporate rip-offs by credit card companies, banks, insurance companies, who have got them all tied up with fine-print contracts that are inscrutable and very, very one-sided. Give us an idea. People listening to these programs say, "Okay, what would Ralph Estes want us to start doing?"

**Ralph Estes:** I'd start by looking at your community. It's tempting, of course, to look to Washington and look at the global situation and say, "Oh, my god, we can't have any impact there." That's not where to start. Start with your community. Look around and see what major corporations, large corporations are represented there.

Look at all the fast food places, the franchises of big corporations. Look at all the national drugstores, Walgreens, CVS and Rite Aid and so forth. Look at the retailers, Walmart and Kmart and so forth. They are all part of a large corporation. Almost anything that's happening in your community, somewhere in that block or in the next two or three blocks, there'll be a facility that comes out of a large corporation even after you've gotten all the local business set aside and so forth.

Now, if you take a large corporation and you take what I consider to be the Ralph Nader approach, which in Washington would be, you'd find the local facility, you'd do the research so that you know what the costs are, not in dollars necessarily, but in the numbers and in the damage, you know what to hold them accountable for. And then you call for a meeting with the local president or representative, which they refuse, or it's totally unsatisfactory.

And then you go public with your demands. You hold a press conference, which may not get much coverage, but then you start doing demonstrations. And sooner or later, this starts to get the media's attention and the editor says, "Go out there and see what these people are up to. They keep showing up."

If you keep showing up and you give your members and those who would like to be members a reason to come out every Saturday or every week and join in the effort, then eventually you'll start

to have an impact. The local impacts, if you're successful in Albuquerque, then spread the word to Phoenix, Amarillo, Austin, and contact your friends there and get them to start doing the same thing. And it becomes an infection throughout the country so that eventually a corporation is saying, "We got to do something about this."

I remember back when we were doing environmental reports on large corporations, aggregate reports, the president of one company was third on the list. And he calls in his staff and he says, "Get us off this damn list. Do whatever we got to do, but get us off that damn list." When I was in accounting, I learned one thing, and I had lots of meetings with corporate executives. And your goodwill, persuasion, your humaneness, these things, they've all got the lip service for it, they've got the words, but it doesn't cause action. I discovered that what causes action is embarrassment. Corporate executives do not want to be embarrassed.

**Ralph Nader:** On your point, embarrassment is another word for shame. And they have to live with people in the community.

**Ralph Estes:** That's right.

**Ralph Nader:** Your idea on focusing locally, they can't run away because that's where they sell. And already it's starting with young people organizing union efforts at Starbucks and Walmart and Amazon. And just in anticipation of these unionizing efforts, wages are being raised.

Walmart is raising its wages and others, and it's only a fraction, only a fraction of the energy that people can exert as you propose at the local level. You even have in the materials that you can get, listeners, Ralph Estes has a model local ordinance you can press on your city council that can also be used as a petition. He has a model campus resolution for students. He has a proposed constitutional amendment that says corporations are not to be treated as persons with constitutional rights. He has op-eds that can be modified and used locally. Useful websites, books and other resources.

So this is a complete menu, listeners, and I want you, Ralph, to tell people how they can get it.

**Ralph Estes:** Well, my intention in doing the book was to incorporate all those ideas and recommendations into a tool that would be available free to the public. And I, of course, could write that and I could put it on my website and spread the word that it's free, but I had the concern that anything free doesn't get taken seriously.

I do music in New Mexico. I do performances. And when they're free, people don't come. When you charge, oh, well, it must be worth something. So I thought, okay, I can charge the minimum amount, I'll put it on Kindle at \$0.99. So I published it through BookBaby, and it's on Kindle and so forth for \$0.99, e-book copies of it.

And I'm sorry if you got to come up with a dollar that goes to the corporate coffers and adds to the corpocracy, but then if you take that dollar as your sacrifice and read the book and do what it says, you will more than regain for the public your dollar and many other costs that corporation imposes.

It's going to be on Ralph Nader's website, and it will let you download the entire copy of "Fight the Corporacy, Take Back Democracy" in PDF format, and available to everybody for free.

**Ralph Nader:** And when we get responses from you listeners as to what actions you have taken or anticipate taking, we'll have Ralph Estes back on the program to take this effort to the next step.

So we want to have a second round here, but it's going to rely on you listeners tapping into the materials that Ralph Estes has just described, trying to initiate something. And then we can talk about it in more detail, because we have more tools for democratic accountability in this country than we're using, far more laws than we're using. We have far more consumer protection laws, small claims courts than we're using.

We don't use the vote. A lot of people, 120 million Americans stay home in a presidential election. So what Ralph Estes is trying to do is flush out some of these existing tools and how you can create your own tools to get things changed in your neighborhood, your community, your state. I mean, you certainly know lack of complaints when you talk to people. They say, "I don't like the taste of this drinking water. What's going on?" Well, you have a right to get information and a regular report from your local water department under the 1974 Drinking Water Safety Act. A lot of people don't even know that.

So this is an interesting wake-up call that has many dimensions to it, and I hope listeners will jump on it once they get this information for \$0.99, as Ralph has said, and work it over in terms of their own local concerns.

Can we have some input, David, Hannah?

**David Feldman:** Thank you. Starbucks came out with its quarterly earnings on Tuesday. They disappointed Wall Street. The company in the past couple of months has lost \$15 billion of its market value. And in Tuesday's earnings report, one of the reasons cited was consumer boycotts that have been sparked by people upset with Starbucks violating NLRB laws when they fire union organizers. And there's been some confusion on how Starbucks stands regarding the situation in Gaza.

Do boycotts work? Can you think of any boycotts that have worked in the past? And I'm just stunned that we're not seeing more boycotts. I grew up, I wasn't allowed to eat grapes. What happened to boycotts? Are they not effective?

**Ralph Estes:** I think boycotts are effective. They may not win the goal that they are articulated for public purposes, but in the process, they've changed corporate behavior. If we had enough boycotts going on, we'd have more substantial accumulation of improvement of corporate behavior.

We don't measure these. You can almost call them collateral effects of boycotts. The fact that citizens are bringing attention to companies and its misbehavior has an effect on its bottom line, on its revenue that gets transmitted up to headquarters and they're saying, what's happening with

your franchise out there in Albuquerque or Santa Fe? You're not up to par. Well, the citizens have been boycotting us. We're going to try to pacify them some and get them away.

Hear that? Pacify some. They'll do something to try to get rid of you. But that something is a step forward. And if you keep it up, boycotts can be effective. They may not be effective in their stated purpose, but they'll be effective in modifying the behavior of the corporation.

**Ralph Nader:** Well, they were effective in the south. The Montgomery bus boycott was the launch of the latest stage of civil rights when black people in Montgomery, Alabama stopped using the buses. That's one.

They also had other boycotts against white racist, segregated retail facilities. And David referred to grapes. Well, Cesar Chavez helped build the farm workers union by convincing people around the country not to buy grapes from the grape owners who were exploiting workers in California. And that had an impact, quite certainly.

So boycotts of Amazon, boycotts of Starbucks. Boycotts work. Why do they work? Because they reduce sales and they create the fear of spreading, and they create the fear of good competitors coming and taking business away because the boycotters don't want to do with the bad business, so they reward the good business. I might say, David, corporations are exceedingly sensitive to very, very small reductions in sales due to boycotts. I mean, their PR people crawl up the wall in fear that something like this will spread, especially in the Internet age.

Hannah?

**Hannah Feldman:** Thank you. I have an accounting question. Can you tell us about externalized costs?

**Ralph Estes:** One of my first articles in a leading accounting journal was mainly a title. I constructed the title and I thought, they can't resist this. And the title was, Socio-Economic Accounting and External Diseconomies, because nobody knew what the hell external diseconomies were. That's back in '73. External diseconomies are simply social costs that are offloaded from the corporation under the backs of the public – the employees, the customers, the neighbors and so forth, and the future generations.

**Ralph Nader:** Before we conclude, Ralph Estes, tell us the scene in business courses and business schools all over the country. Are they picking up on what you're describing as social accounting, or is it just back to normal profit and loss statements that don't account for the damage and the externalities of corporate behavior?

**Ralph Estes:** Ralph, in 2005, I looked at what I was doing in Washington and I thought, this is reasonably successful. But in fact, I'm not moving football. We're not getting anywhere. So I'm going to give this field to somebody else, give them a chance, and I'm going to go to New Mexico. And I haven't really followed what's going on in the universities or in the area of what I call corporate social reporting, except to note that there are dribbles here and there. There's always

been dribbles here or there. We get minor successes and we would praise ourselves and pat ourselves on the back, but they disappear. And then we look for others.

There is a movement now, the DEI requirement – diversity, equity and inclusion. Also ESG management – environmental, social and governance. These have gotten enough attention that the far-right is starting to focus on them and attack them. Now, that's good news. Once you get the attention on the far-right, then you must be doing something right.

So there is some continued movement, but Ralph there's been continued movement since 1970, and we're still pretty much where we were when all this started. The power of the corporate system, the corpocracy, and the money it embodies, is just so great that the only way we can counter it, unless we can come up with a like amount of money, is through our bodies, our individuals. We might be able to do it that way, starting at their vulnerable grassroots, stepping on their toes, their neighborhoods area, and making them hurt until they change. And this trickles up eventually to the boardroom.

**Ralph Nader:** We haven't touched on the accounting profession, which has deep problems of maintaining its independence, instead of being a toady for corporate accounting manipulation that goes on all over the country and has led to serious economic disasters, such as the Wall Street crash.

But in the next time we have you on, Ralph, we'll go into the accounting profession. We revere the memory of Abraham Briloff, who was one of the great critics of the accounting profession in book after book, which is still very relevant today. And I'm looking at two giant congressional hearings that were held on the accounting profession years ago that would never happen today, because as citizens, we have withdrawn. We have often become very pessimistic. We have basically asked ourselves, whatever will be, will be, so why change anything?

Well, as Norman Cousins once said, Ralph Estes, quote, "Nobody's smart enough to be a pessimist," end quote. Thank you very much. Give one more time the title of this toolkit that you have.

**Ralph Estes:** "Fight the Corpocracy, Take Back Democracy".

**Ralph Nader:** Thank you very much, Professor Emeritus, Ralph Estes. We expect a great rebound from your work and more people to discover your work, because you give them the whole menu of corporate original purpose, corporate abuse of the original purpose of chartering corporations, the enormous wide range damage they're doing to communities in the globe, to manipulating the government, and then all the things that people can do about it.

Once you control the yardsticks, you control the agenda, and you begin controlling what the media covers. Corporations now control the yardsticks, but we outnumber them. We can outvote them, we can out-purchase them, we can out-boycott them, and we can prevail.

Thank you very much, Professor Estes.



**Ralph Estes:** Thanks. My pleasure.

**David Feldman:** You made it easy for lawyers to dedicate their lives to working in the public interest. Is anybody doing that for accountants?

**Ralph Nader:** We started one. There was an accountant in New Jersey, who was very public-spirited. And we started an informal group of accountants who would volunteer and help citizen groups who were trying to deconstruct corporate corruption and manipulation of their economic information. But it never coalesced into a formal group.

**David Feldman:** Right. I mean, you made it a career choice for lawyers. Nobody's doing that for accountants.

**Ralph Nader:** No, that's what we were trying to do, David. It was called Public Interest Accounting Group, just an informal cluster of several dozen around the country who said if the group had a problem with the city hall's financial budgets or corporation shenanigans, they would help. But we couldn't get them in sufficient numbers to support a full-time group with staff.

**David Feldman:** With artificial intelligence taking jobs away from accountants, this would be a good career path for them. Maybe stop working for corporations and start working for the people.

**Ralph Nader:** Exactly. That was exactly the principle of this group.

**Hannah Feldman:** Like a public fiduciary.

**Ralph Nader:** Yeah. They're supposed to be independent, an independent profession. They became captured and indentured to the corporations they serve. And Arthur Andersen got so entwined with corporate corruption like Enron that it went bankrupt, belly up, the whole giant Arthur Andersen accounting firm unemploying tens of thousands of accountants. So that's what happens.

The whole idea of a profession is public service, independence and a learned tradition. Those are three criteria that you can call people members of a profession. And the accounting firm violated all of them.

**Steve Skrovan:** I want to thank our guests again, Eva Borgwardt and Ralph Estes.

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 with "In Case You Haven't Heard", and some listener questions. Transcript of this program will appear on the Ralph Nader Radio Hour Substack site soon after the episode is posted.

**David Feldman:** Subscribe to us on our Ralph Nader Radio Hour YouTube channel. And for Ralph's weekly column, you can get it for free by going to [nader.org](http://nader.org). For more from Russell Mokhiber, go to [corporatecrimereporter.com](http://corporatecrimereporter.com).

**Steve Skrovan:** The American Museum of Tort Law has gone virtual. Go to [tortmuseum.org](http://tortmuseum.org) to explore the exhibits, take a virtual tour and learn about iconic tort cases from history.

**David Feldman:** We have a new issue of the Capitol Hill Citizen. It's out now. To order your copy of the Capitol Hill Citizen, Democracy Dies in Broad Daylight, go to [capitolhillcitizen.com](http://capitolhillcitizen.com).

**Steve Skrovan:** And remember to continue the conversation after each show. Go to the comments section at [ralphnaderradiohour.com](http://ralphnaderradiohour.com) and post a comment or question on this week's episode. I read them all.

**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 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. And the next edition of the Capitol Hill Citizen, listeners, is about to hit the print shop and be distributed to every member of Congress and to any of you who want to go to [capitolhillcitizen.com](http://capitolhillcitizen.com) to obtain a copy.