

## RALPH NADER RADIO HOUR EP 448 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:** And we have the man of the hour, Ralph Nader. Hello, Ralph.

**Ralph Nader:** Hello, everybody.

**Steve Skrovan:** Our first guest will be Dr. Susan Linn, one of the world's leading experts on the impact of big tech and big business on children. In her new book, *Who's Raising the Kids?* Dr. Linn explores the influence of tech enabled marketing on our culture, how it molds our values and attitudes, shapes how we conceptualize ourselves and others, motivates us to act and guides our choices. We'll speak to her about how new tech has allowed marketers to access children in insidious ways, the toxic effects of commercialism, and how we can make things better.

In the second-half of the program we're going to welcome back President of Public Citizen, Robert Weissman. Among the many things that organization does--full disclosure, I'm on the board--it remains at the forefront of protecting the United States Post Office (USPS).

Rob is going to fill us in on Public Citizen's efforts to encourage the Biden administration to fire the Trump appointed Postmaster General Louis DeJoy, who in the interest of so-called efficiency has been slowly dismantling and privatizing this constitutionally protected institution. The post office plays a particularly important role in our democracy, especially in these pandemic times when mail-in voting has become so necessary.

As always, somewhere in the middle, we'll check in with our corporate crime reporter Russell Mokhiber. But first, let's find out who's raising our kids. David?

**David Feldman:** Founding Director of the Campaign for Commercial-Free Childhood, Dr. Susan Linn is an author, psychologist, award-winning ventriloquist, and a world-renowned expert on creative play and the impact of media and commercial marketing on children. Her latest book is *Who's Raising the Kids?: Big Tech, Big Business, and the Lives of Children*. Welcome to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*, Dr. Susan Linn.

**Susan Linn:** Well, I'm so happy to be here and I'm looking forward to this conversation.

**Ralph Nader:** Welcome, indeed. This is a subject close to our work over the years, Susan. And it's great to have this magnificent book come out now when there's so much discussion, from the Federal Trade Commission to the California State Legislature, and

other reports on the exploitation of children by the internet giants, among other corporations that are huckstering their way radically around parental guidance and control while direct marketing to children hour after hour after hour. So let's ask the first and most obvious question, who's raising the kids?

**Susan Linn:** Well, I think one thing that sometimes we forget is that parents have never been the only ones raising children, and that children are affected not just by their families, but also by their communities and also by the larger forces in society. And the problem today is so much of society is controlled by corporations, and that directly affects children's lives in so many ways. In my book, what I was really focusing on was mostly big tech, but also other corporations on how they manipulate children for profit. And why that's just so toxic for kids, for families and actually for the greater society.

**Ralph Nader:** What's interesting about your book is that you have a very, very refined sense of the benefits of raising children in reality, and not virtual reality and Facebook's Metaverse. I was pretty taken by the list you have on page 210 where you say there are "six principles of child development to help adults make decisions about introducing tech to young children." And it's just right on. It's the way traditional families at their best raised their children. One is young children live and learn in the context of social relationships. That's real time. Another is young children use their whole bodies and all their senses to learn about the world—real world. Third is young children learn best and benefit most from direct firsthand experience in the world of actual relationships and objects. Fourth is young children are active learners who learn by inventing ideas. And five, young children build inner resilience and coping skills through play."

Everything these corporations seem to be aiming at is to undermine those experiences and to seduce and addict the children into the internet gulag. Your comments?

**Susan Linn:** Yeah, first of all, I need to thank Dr. Nancy Carlsson-Paige. I modified her principles and used them in the book. And the digitized, overly commercialized culture that children wake up to every day undermines every single one of those principles, starting from relationships. And one of the things that is troubling me the most today is that the new technologies, the people who own them and make them, are coming between parents and children. And I don't think they're doing it to purposely destroy families. I think of them more as amoral than immoral. I don't know if you would agree with that, but it's just that they're not thinking about that. What they're thinking about is grabbing children's attention, getting them in front of screens or in front of these tech toys as much as possible, for as long as possible. And one way they do that is to market their products as being beneficial to parents and to children. They market them as educational for children, at least to adults that's how they market them. And they give parents the sense that these products are going to make their lives easier. But what they're really doing is taking over what should be the purview of parents and teachers and people who really know and care deeply about children, not just about exploiting children for profit. I write a fair amount in the book about Amazon's Alexa for Kids. And it's advertised as being able to help kids with homework, but I have a chapter in the book that's called "Bias for Sale" and it's about the racism embedded in commercial

culture. And as I was writing it, I read Safiya Noble's book *Algorithms of Oppression*, which is about the racism embedded in search engines. And her journey began when she typed black girls into a Google search and came up with pornography, which is not what she came up with when she typed white girls. So I had bought an Echo Dot for kids, which, by the way, is just cute as hell. I mean, it's so cute that when I opened it, I actually went "aww." It's this little tiger and we're wired to respond to cuteness. I mean, that's part of the marketing. So I had it down on my kitchen table and I went downstairs and I decided to try to replicate Safiya Noble's questions. So I said to this little Echo Dot tiger, "Alexa, what are African-American girls?" And Alexa responded, "African American girls are the fastest growing portion of the juvenile justice system." I just couldn't believe it so I kept asking it over and over and over again. And then I asked, "Alexa, what are African American boys?" And it was a little garbled, but it basically said there were many boys that were African American, and many of them have trouble with learning and reading. So Alexa, marketing it as helping kids with homework, was telling the child I was pretending to be that African American children were both bad and stupid. And it's just enraging that at a time when books are being banned, teachers and librarians are being silenced, and can't talk to kids about important things, that the tech companies are pretty much unregulated and can say basically anything they want to children.

**Ralph Nader:** That's what I call the arrogance of the algorithms. And I must take issue with you when you said you don't think this is a deliberate design to undermine the family.

**Susan Linn:** I didn't say that though. I didn't say—

**Ralph Nader:** Go ahead, say what you said.

**Susan Linn:** Okay, I said I think it's absolutely deliberate design. And there is a name for it; it's persuasive design. It's based on behavioral psychology and it's designed to get people to do whatever the people making the products want them to do.

**Ralph Nader:** I thought I heard you say that they were amoral.

**Susan Linn:** I think that they don't think about the consequences of what they're doing.

**Ralph Nader:** Okay, that's where I take issue, because the executives in Silicon Valley restrict their own children.

**Susan Linn:** And they don't care about anybody else's children.

**Ralph Nader:** Yeah, the corporate model with the parents of the children they want to sell to directly is a zero-sum model. They have to reduce parental involvement and control when they direct market half a trillion dollars of products and services to children every year. Now, if you go to Madison Avenue's language over the years, it goes back a long time, they use words like the corporate parent. They use words like this ad has a

"high nag factor" of their mother or father. So they know exactly what they're doing just the way the tobacco industry knew what they were doing when they handed out free cigarettes to middle school students leaving school in the afternoon because if they could hook them early, they'd hook them for life. That's what I meant when I said I take issue with you. Your reaction?

**Susan Linn:** I agree with you. I think we basically agree. I think amoral is pretty terrible. And I'll go with immoral as well. Absolutely.

**Ralph Nader:** I don't want to give the listeners the impression that this is anything but a tough book. This is a really tough book, and it's detailed; it names proper names of business leaders, and corporations, and products, and it is in the old muckraking style, very well documented.

**Susan Linn:** Well, thank you. Writing this book was quite a journey.

**Ralph Nader:** Well, I think it raised eyebrows because at least here in Washington, but we're not used to books like that from academics, much less people who teach at Harvard Medical School, which raises an interesting issue in your book. My sister, Laura Nader, has taught anthropology for about sixty years at Berkeley. And a few years ago she made a comment to me; she said all these books that are coming out from academic people, good critiques of society, do not tap in to the reports, experiences and studies of actual citizen groups on the ground. For example, and correct me if I'm mistaken, the Center for Science in the Public Interest has been documenting the food industry, the junk food industry, exploiting of kids mercilessly—fat, sugar, salt, which you point out, but you don't tap into their materials. Do you find that academics are not close enough to citizen groups on the ground who are really putting out very good reports? They get material from litigation, subpoenas, depositions, testimony. ? I thought that that kind of collaboration would strengthen whatever forces you want to put in motion. Your reaction?

**Susan Linn:** Yeah, I absolutely agree. First of all, I think of myself more as an activist, really, than an academic. And I do help psychiatry residents learn how to use puppets to work with children. And this book is filled with research. Everything is documented. I mean, that's really true. But some colleagues and I founded Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood, which is now called Fairplay, 22 years ago. And we did it because we really felt that advertising and marketing to children is a social justice issue and that it needed an activist organization. So I agree with you that academics' hands don't get as deep into the real world or the citizen activism that they should. And one thing that really annoys me about research on children and technology is that they often do studies where they have some kind of tech intervention, and it shows in the research that it's beneficial, say. But they compare it to no intervention, and they don't compare it to an intervention that has nothing to do with either commercialism or technology. So I think that there is a problem with the academic research.

I think a report recently came out about the Metaverse and the possibilities for

education in the Metaverse. And it was written by very respected academics. And they never said anything about the fact that everything that's going to go on in the Metaverse, or is already going on in the Metaverse, is owned by corporations. They never talk about that. And they don't talk about what the consequences are going to be of immersing kids in this incredibly compelling world that is completely dominated by corporate interests.

**Ralph Nader:** We're talking with Susan Linn, the author of the brand new book, *Who's Raising the Kids?: Big Tech, Big Business, and the Lives of Children*, published by the New Press, and you're right, the group you founded, Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood, is a very active group. One paragraph on page 240 really jumped out and I just want to read it to the listeners and get your comment. You say, "But I do know that the children of today, living as adults in this future world, will be much better off if we provide them with opportunities that nurture and bring to fruition qualities like curiosity, empathy, kindness, creativity, critical thinking and compassion. If they learn to see through and resist the false promises and environmental harms of marketing-induced consumption, if they can recognize the important differences between the real world and what Mark Zuckerberg has now branded the Metaverse, none of these qualities or skills can be taught or inspired by corporations looking to exploit kids for profit."

That reminds me I have to say of my sister Claire Nader's new book called *You Are Your Own Best Teacher!* addressed to tweens, and I want to ask your reaction to what does Zuckerberg plan when he talks about the Metaverse in contrast to the internet--is it a deeper gulag? A lot of people don't know how to define his grim vision of the Metaverse. Can you help them out?

**Susan Linn:** Yes. The technology is evolving and it's getting increasingly realistic visually and increasingly compelling. And I think that Mark Zuckerberg's vision is that he and his company, Meta, are going to make a huge amount of money by immersing people in this world that is going to be so compelling that they aren't going to want to leave it. And that's so scary. It's just so scary that the combination of this incredibly compelling and sophisticated, seductive technology and unregulated capitalism is already terrible for children, and is going to get even more terrible.

And one of the things that I think is important for people to remember is that commercialism, or advertising and marketing, which is what all of these devices we love so much, were basically made for--that it doesn't just sell products, it sells values and behaviors, and the values of commercial culture such as "me first, materialism, and image is more important than anything else." Those values are so harmful to society, and especially now we just had this horrible hurricane in Florida and one in Puerto Rico, and we know that global warming is real, and we know that one thing that contributes to it is consumption. And we are immersing kids in a world where the most important value, the most powerful value that they're being taught every day is that it's the things they buy that will make them happy.

**Ralph Nader:** And as you know from your own profession, it doesn't make them happy.

It increases fear, anxiety, dread, self-hate--the cosmetic industry, for example, defining beauty, all of those things. When a person steps back and looks at how these giant corporations-- immunized as they are by their corporate law firms, unsupervised by Congress and state legislatures--are planning, it's nonstop. It's 24/7 strategic planning of a corporate childhood as you put it. And this amounts to nothing more than tempting, seducing and addicting these children into the internet gulag, and abducting them from their own parents five to seven hours a day, and who knows what the rest of the day is like as a result.

**Susan Linn:** And the other thing is that the industry likes to put it all on parents. Parents should just say no. It's up to parents. I mean, that's the underlying message of these tech people who protect their own children. Bill Gates didn't get a smartphone for his child until the child was 14. Steve Jobs didn't let his kids play with an iPad. So the message is you just have to be a good parent; you're not a good enough parent, when clearly even two-parent families that have enough money, are not struggling financially, have time and resources, they're struggling now, and their kids are struggling now. But kids from low-income families, single parents stressed by unemployment or working serial jobs, are hit even harder. Kids from low-income families spend two hours a day more with screens than their middle-class and upper-middle-class peers.

**Ralph Nader:** If our listeners have children in those age brackets—nine to 12 or eight or 13 or 15—when should they respond affirmatively to a child's demand for a cell phone?

**Susan Linn:** Well, first of all, the commercialization of children's lives begins in infancy. Even prenatally it begins. A long time ago there was a Dr. Seuss book that you were supposed to read to kids in utero. Dr. Seuss wrote some wonderful books, but the idea of branding babies before they're even born was pretty amazing. So it begins in infancy. And basically, there's no benefit. And, we can't just talk about screens anymore. The new technologies, including electronic toys that chirp, beep, dance, and do backflips all by themselves, have no benefit. They don't benefit children at all. They don't benefit babies and toddlers. And they deprive kids of the second principle that I talked about, which is exploring the world with all of their senses. So it begins in infancy, and it's really better to keep young children away from screens. Now, that's complicated because people always say, well, what about video chatting? And that is the one exception. Video chatting with adults who are far away who love them, is a benefit to children and families. But the huge ed tech industry and the huge app industry for preschoolers, infants and toddlers undermines children's normal healthy development. And what it also does is bind them to the screens where they learn, not how to soothe and amuse themselves or not to turn to other people for that, but to turn to a screen for soothing and amusing. And so in a way, they're being taught to fall in love with these devices.

**Ralph Nader:** Some people would call it addiction. Every major religion in the world thousands of years ago, warned their adherents not to give too much power to the merchant class, because the commercial motive is relentless, all-encompassing, and it will destroy or co-opt other civic values that are far more important for society to sustain.

And I say this because what these corporations are doing... they are the fundamental radical extremists in our society. They're not recognizing the most important functional traditions. I use the word functional traditions that come out of civil society, religious practices, and other sources of social nurturing and cohesion at their best. We haven't reached that point of condemnation yet.

**Susan Linn:** No, I think, more than they co-opt civil society and the spiritual world as well. I mean, churches, synagogues, mosques and temples are encouraged to brand; it's all about branding. And nonprofits are encouraged to brand. And not only that, one way nonprofits are co-opted is by the lure of corporate funding. Philanthropy is a terrible way to run a world anyway. But when nonprofits that are supposedly dealing with harms like childhood obesity linked to junk food and junk food advertising take corporate funding from the food industry or the sugar industry, or when dietitians take corporate funding--you don't want to bite the hand that feeds you, and you may think you're going to be independent, but you're not. And one of the things that I'm so proud of is that even today - and I left Fairplay, I guess in 2015 - Fairplay does not take any corporate funding. And there aren't a lot of nonprofits that is true for anymore. There are a few, and I list them in my book.

**Ralph Nader:** I wanted to say to the listeners, you listed almost two dozen civic groups that are right on. They're trying to battle this commercialization of childhood and undermining parental control and guidance. And they're all listed at the end of your book with a little description of each one—Fairplay, Screen Time Action Network at Fairplay, that is an extension. You have Screen-Free Week, 5Rights Foundation, Accountable Tech, Alana Institute, Algorithmic Justice League, Backyard Basecamp, Center for Digital Democracy--I've known that for years--Center for Humane Democracy, Children and Media Australia, Children and Nature Network. You have Foolproof Foundation, Defending the Early Years. Michelle Singletary, the syndicated consumer columnist for the *Washington Post*, had a column a while back asking the question, "Why do two-year-olds need credit cards?" They're pushing credit cards on two-year-olds.

**Susan Linn:** Yes, they are.

**Ralph Nader:** Why? Because it's important to establish your credit rating and your credit score at an early age. I mean, there's no limit to commercialism. That's why it's so dangerous. There's no limit to profit.

**Susan Linn:** And not only that, one of the most worrisome pieces of this is the commercialization of schools and what's taught in schools. And do I have a couple of chapters on that. And what I actually did is play or work with the credit card companies' teaching materials on managing money, which is just so absurd. If it wasn't so dangerous, it would be funny. Credit card companies, as you know, benefit when people don't manage their money well. That's kind of the point of them. That's how they make their money is the huge interest rates. And yet here they are pretending to teach kids financial literacy. That's ridiculous, and that's why I included the Foolproof Foundation, which does not take any corporate money and does work with children to help them

learn how to manage money. I think that's really important. Share Saves Spend is another organization listed in my book.

**Ralph Nader:** Yes, there's something for everybody. These are often organizations that have different emphasis, but they all have a similar goal of freeing children to be children, to have a childhood, free as you say, of commercial exploitation. Now the other side would say, oh, but the internet opens up a great world. They can learn geography, they can learn how to become marine biologists by logging in to places under the sea. They can actually enter a three-dimensional world where they can climb Mount Everest from their bedroom. What do you say to all that?

**Susan Linn:** Well, I mentioned that report about the Metaverse and it talked about how amazing it would be for children to be able to see, actually, experience the prehistoric world. But as I said, what they don't talk about is who is sponsoring that prehistoric world? Who owns the prehistoric world? And how does that affect what they're teaching kids and how they're teaching them? And I think that for older children, it's possible for screens to have some educational value. But, for young children, I don't think there's much. For older kids, although it's possible, the problem is the technology is so powerful and the business models are so destructive and so harmful. And it's that combination. People often ask me or accuse me of being tech phobic. And I have to laugh about that, because I worked in television. And I began my professional life as a ventriloquist performing for kids. I worked with Fred Rogers on Mister Rogers' Neighborhood. I see the potential, but the potential is being undermined and distorted and exploited by corporate business models that value profit over everything else.

**Ralph Nader:** And also there's another downside. The more screen time they use - apart from all the nasty exchanges and the peer group stuff that comes in and the anonymous hate stuff - let's assume these children are using it to educate themselves. Of course, during the pandemic, the internet people said, "See, they could stay at home and not get caught with the virus and still do their courses." But my impression is that one of the downsides is they read less. Years ago you'd give a book to an eight-year-old or a 10-year-old, and it would be graciously received as if, "Oh my. Thank you." Now it's like, "Do I have to carry this?"

I found in our circle that even when the kids have a reason to read an adult's book, they're part of a family or relatives or close friends in the neighborhood, they're far less likely to do that now. They've become aliterate. They know how to read, but they don't read. So that's another downside because there's no substitute for picking up a book and reading it compared to entering screen time hour after hour during the day, because you're never let alone by the perpetrators, the penetrators, when you're on the screen. The clutter, the interference, the ads. You're never let alone, but if you have a book on your lap, you're let alone. So there's a solitude that is destroyed here. Your reaction?

**Susan Linn:** Yeah, It's certainly true that books are written to capture attention. But the words don't jump off the page and dance and sing and distract you and suck you in. The

book is so much more a marriage between the reader and the author that the reader brings something to the book as well as the author. But one thing I write about is that the tech industry is trying to convince parents that e-books are great for kids and young kids. And you should read e-books to children. But what the research is showing is that the e-books that have all of these movable things and little birds that tweet and all that, don't engender the kind of dialogue that promotes literacy or deep thinking, that there's a (lack of) dialogue between parents and children looking at an e-book that's augmented.

**Ralph Nader:** Your part on commercializing education is really superb. You should not just get this book--*Who's Raising the Kids?*--this is one of the most fundamental questions of our era because the planet is running out of time. If these kids continue to be lobotomized and commercialized and indentured to commercial manipulation, what are they going to be facing when they're adults and have to take over the world as adults? What kind of leadership are we generating here? This is extremely serious.

**Susan Linn:** I'm not without hope. And the book isn't...I mean, there's a lot of really upsetting things in the book, but it also talks about the activism that has made changes, is working to make changes, and the importance of that. And in a funny way, when there's so much about the world right now that is so horrible, and the activists and the advocates that I talk to are more hopeful about making change and possibly getting some tech company regulation, then...

**Ralph Nader:** Well, that leads me to suggest to our listeners that this book by Susan Linn, *Who's Raising the Kids?* is perfect for family discussion. You create a special family book club and you read this book together. It can be understood by children as young as 10, 11, 12, and the specifics will be understood because they experience them. She has so many examples of things they experience when they open that cellphone and get into the internet. So *Who's Raising the Kids?* is more than a book for an individual to read. It's a book for family conversation. One can exaggerate a bit by saying all justice movements start with family conversations. When you look at the great leaders of social justice over the last two centuries in our country, and they're asked by their biographers or whoever interviews them, how did you become a social justice leader? Well, it often comes back to their parents and what they talked about at home and where their parents took them--to marches and rallies and gatherings--where these issues were discussed.

So this book, *Who's Raising the Kids?* by Susan Linn, is a discussion family book, not just an individual. It's a book to give to your local library for their reading circles. It's a book for some of the thousands of neighborhood book clubs to drop their ridiculous rule that they will not discuss any nonfiction book, only fiction books. They don't want controversy to become more mature and pick up a book like this. Otherwise the entire planet will be fictionalized into something called the Metaverse or whatever follows it on its way to Neptune.

**Susan Linn:** I just don't want people to be discouraged and give up because that's

what the corporations want. And they want the sense that they are inevitable, right?

**Ralph Nader:** And they're expert at wearing you down, not just in court.

**Susan Linn:** They're expert at wearing you down and that's why I talk about stamina. I agree with you that we're really in a crisis. Things need to happen quickly and they should have happened years or decades ago. I just don't want people to get discouraged and give up if it doesn't happen right away.

**Ralph Nader:** That's right. And that's why we have to have a fighting spirit. David, Steve, do you want to pitch in here?

**Steve Skrovan:** Yes. Susan, you mentioned you worked with Fred Rogers and were on *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*, how savvy was he to the corporate and commercialization of childhood, and what did you learn from him?

**Susan Linn:** What was incredible about Fred Rogers is that he really did put children first. I first saw his show when I was 19, and I was starting out in my ventriloquism career, and he was doing what I wanted to do, basically using the medium of television really to help children. The show was completely for children, and that was at a cost to its popularity, because parents didn't like it so much. A lot of parents didn't like it; it was too slow. It was absolutely focused on young children. And one thing that show helped me do is try to live my life that way. My performances for children, and I made videotapes about difficult issues for kids, some of them with his company, just to focus on children and what they need. That was extraordinary in television.

It's funny about that show, because parents complained it wasn't hip. It looked like a 1950s show. But if you really dive into what he did--shows on greed, shows on war, and he actually did shows on war for children. Fred Rogers took on huge social issues. Whether he would see it as the problems of corporations the way that Ralph and I do, I don't know. We never had that conversation.

**Ralph Nader:** David?

**David Feldman:** Yes, thank you. Circling back to the family, I know parents who have said to me, I can't get my kids to stop playing video games. And I say throw out the game box. And the parents say, well then I can't play. So how do we get parents/adults to realize how dangerous social media is for themselves? Don't they have to see the damage it's doing to them to get them off social media before they realize they have to get their kids off it.

**Susan Linn:** I think what they need to learn is that children model themselves after us, after their parents. And the phrase is, "We are our child's first teacher." So, the more we use technology, the more likely our kids are going to use it as well. And one of the really troubling things is there's research showing that when parents are immersed in a screen, like at a playground when their kids are playing, they don't respond to their kids

calling them. It's like you don't even hear it. And when they do respond, they're more likely to respond with irritation. And the same is true for kids as well when they're immersed in it. But I think it's easier to see the problems for other people than to see them for ourselves. It's like the third person thing. And so, in some ways, it's easier for parents to see the problems for their kids than it is to see it for themselves. "Oh, I can handle social media; I'm an adult. But I know it's bad for my kids." But then we're in a situation where a child's social life may be so tied up with screens that it just gets more complicated. And that's why I think we really need to start prenatally, before parents even have kids, to talk about the realities of what's going on in the homes. It needs to start from birth. And it's easier to give than it is to take away. But it's true. If you have a child who is on social media to the exclusion of everything else, then you, your family and the child have a big problem.

**Ralph Nader:** It separates them from the realities they have to confront as they grow older. Separates them from family, community, nature. That's why I call it the internet gulag of virtual reality. Do you have a website you want to give Fairplay or something?

**Susan Linn:** Well, my website is [susanlinn.net](http://susanlinn.net) and Fairplay's website is [fairplayforkids.org](http://fairplayforkids.org).

**Ralph Nader:** We've been talking with Susan Linn. Her last name is spelled L-I-N-N. She is described on the jacket of this book as a psychologist, award-winning ventriloquist, and a world-renowned expert on creative play in the impact of media and commercial marketing on children. One of her prior books, *Consuming Kids*, shows that she's been at this for a long time. And thank goodness for that, Susan Linn.

**Susan Linn:** Thank you so much, Ralph, and thanks for so much that you do.

**Steve Skrovan:** We've been speaking with Dr. Susan Linn. We will link to her book, *Who's Raising the Kids?* Up next, Robert Weissman of Public Citizen is going to tell us about his efforts to sic the dogs on a certain mailman. But first, let's 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, October 7, 2022. I'm Russell Mokhiber.

Kim Kardashian will pay \$1.26 million to settle charges brought by the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) that she touted on social media a crypto asset security offered and sold by EthereumMax without disclosing the payment she received for the promotion. Kardashian was represented by Patrick Gibbs of Cooley, LLP in San Francisco.

The SEC alleged that Kardashian failed to disclose that she was paid \$250,000 to publish a post on her Instagram account about EMAX tokens, the crypto asset security being offered by EthereumMax. Kardashian's post contained a link to the EthereumMax

website, which provided instructions for potential investors to purchase EMAX tokens.

For the *Corporate Crime Reporter*, I'm Russell Mokhiber. 42/0 din break

**Steve Skrovan:** Thank you, Russell. Welcome back to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*. I'm Steve Skrovan, along with David Feldman and Ralph. We've asked this question before, why does Trump appointed Postmaster, Louis DeJoy, still have a job? Well, our next guest is trying to get him fired. David?

**David Feldman:** Robert Weissman is a staunch public interest advocate and activist, as well as an expert on a wide variety of issues ranging from corporate accountability and government transparency, to trade and globalization, to economic and regulatory policy. As the President of Public Citizen, Weissman has spearheaded the effort to loosen the chokehold corporations and the wealthy have over our democracy.

Welcome back to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*, Robert Weissman.

**Robert Weissman:** Hey, it's good to be with you.

**Ralph Nader:** Welcome back indeed, Robert, who was and is Postmaster General Louis DeJoy and why do you want him fired?

**Robert Weissman:** Well, he is the Postmaster General of the United States, which as you know, is the person in charge of the U.S. Postal Service (USPS). Probably his main qualification for that job as a Trump appointee was that he it was a Trump political contributor. His other sort of so-called qualification for the job is he was in the private business of shipping. So Ralph, as you know, the tradition of the post office for the postmaster general comes from within the US Postal Service. But Trump appointed somebody who came from a competitor industry and also does business with the Postal Service to take over. As best anyone can tell, he seems to view his mission as head of the Postal Service to be destroying the Postal Service. And he's gone about doing that pretty aggressively in terms of both trying to really hollow out the whole service. He wants to raise postal rates, diminish the quality of service, slow down delivery time, slash the staff, and reduce the quality of life for the workers there. That's a pretty good package for undermining the business or the enterprise of the Postal Service altogether.

If you're a private equity person, you might come into a corporation and slash it and then resell it and sort of make some money in the process. But if you're running the Postal Service, given the unique nature of what it is and it's essentially public character, the more you cut it, the more you weaken it. You can't cut it down to save it. You have to expand it and make it more robust. Its significance in American history and its future depends on it being a network that connects all of us and does so efficiently. So the more you reduce it, the less chance it has to be relevant in the lives of Americans.

**Ralph Nader:** As Chris Shaw said in his new book on the Postal Service, (*First Class: The U.S. Postal Service, Democracy, and the Corporate Threat*) there are a lot of

opportunities to expand the Postal Service, not just allow them to ship certain products that are prohibited them from shipping and left for the private competitors to do, like FedEx and UPS. And as you were saying, why is he still there a year and nine months of a democratic administration? What's the Board of Governors situation all about?

**Robert Weissman:** Right. So there's no good answer to that. President Biden cannot directly fire the postmaster general. He's accountable to a Board of Governors. But the president does appoint the members of the Board of Governors over a staggered set of time. There has not yet been a majority on the board to fire DeJoy because of poor prior appointments from Biden. However, two new positions are going to come open, in December. And if Biden makes appropriate appointments then there would be a majority that could finally get DeJoy off the board. And we and many others are calling on President Biden and the administration and pressuring them to make sure that happens.

**Ralph Nader:** Tell us about your coalition of over 80 groups all over the country demanding that he be fired.

**Robert Weissman:** Yeah, it's very interesting. So there are 80 groups and there are other coalitions, so probably even more including the some really excellent unions representing the workers at the Postal Service now. This has historically been a niche issue, Ralph, which you've been involved in for so many decades. It's really now garnered the attention of a wide variety of advocacy organizations for many reasons. First, you have an increasing number of democracy groups that see the Postal Service as essential to making sure that mail-in ballots are delivered in a timely way. We sued the Postal Service, and we got commitments that we think are pretty ironclad over the next six or so years to make sure they do that, but you need a functioning Postal Service to be able to do that. And that's been one thing that's expanded the set of people interested.

I think civil rights organizations have increasingly seen how important the Postal Service is as an avenue of opportunity for historically black and also other people of color to get good jobs and raise and support families. And people are starting to see also the possibility, as you're saying, of the Postal Service expanding to provide new kinds of services, especially banking services to compete with predatory lending agencies or banks that are redlining or blocking out lower- income communities. And so that's brought in a whole range of other organizations that are interested in just the kind of core consumer and financial issues for people across the country.

And then last is: the coalition that has expanded, has been the growing understanding that the Postal Service necessarily has a big footprint in society. It has a big energy footprint in society, and can either be part of the solution of transitioning us to a renewable future or an obstacle. So there's been a big fight over the next round of Postal Service vehicles. DeJoy wanted to rely almost not at all on electric vehicles. Under pressure the Postal Service is going to make a big buy of electric vehicles. But really they should commit from here on out to only buying electric vehicles. Anyway,

those sets of factors have really enabled us to pull together a big coalition. And everybody's united around the problem of Louis DeJoy and getting him out of office.

**Ralph Nader:** And it has such a big reach. There are about 30,000 post offices and branches in the United States for emergency purposes--in delivering medicines in emergency situations. There's no comparison with any other distribution system. What do you think the prospect in Congress is? I mean, Congress really can change the situation here. Give us your read on where the House and Senate are and where are the two parties.

**Robert Weissman:** Well, as you know, Congress really created a huge problem with the Postal Service by legislatively requiring the Postal Service to pre-fund its pension and retiree health benefits going forward decades, something that no business would ever do. And that made it appear that the Postal Service was in a far worse financial crisis than it actually was. And Congress just undid that, which was a major step forward to stabilizing the Postal Service. So we have seen some progress. And I think particularly as DeJoy seemed out to sabotage the 2020 election, a lot of Democrats - at least - really started to focus in on the threat that he posed. So Congress has been somewhat helpful in a way that it hasn't been the case over previous years and decades. But for sure there's a lot more to do. But the decision-making authority right now really rests with the President. These next two appointments are going to be key to deciding whether DeJoy stays on as Postmaster General. And whether he stays on, or is replaced by someone who's got a much bigger commitment to the actual functioning of the Postal Service, I think is going to be decisive for the future of USPS.

**Ralph Nader:** Well, it should be an election campaign issue as well. I mean the Democrats are rather weak in rural areas, but rural areas want to preserve the post office as it is now and improve it, not corporatize it or undermine it the way the Republicans are leaning. So it could be a good point of advantage in appealing to rural and farm areas in our country where the post office is a gathering place; it's a meeting place. It's an exchange of intangible conversations in addition to tapping into all kinds of federal services and pamphlets and using it to ship letters and packages. Do you see any of that coming around? I mean, anybody talking it up on the hustings?

**Robert Weissman:** Well, it actually did happen. Again, DeJoy is a flashpoint both in terms of the functioning of the 2020 election, and also just the functioning of the Postal Service for the reasons you said. It did become a significant social and political issue in the 2020 election. I'm not sure it's resonating quite as much right now; the dynamic is a little bit different with the president being a Democrat. But everything you said is absolutely right and as you know, the support for the government is stronger and federal agencies than people realize among the public. Most of the public supports most of what the federal government does, at least when they do it well.

But support for the Postal Service is through the roof, and it's in significant part because of what you said. It may be that a lot of the elite opinion makers themselves don't personally rely as much on the Postal Service and the post offices around the country

as regular people do. But across the country, that's lived experience. And you see numbers for the Postal Service of support and strong support in the '80s and even venturing toward 90% support. No one wants the Postal Service cut back. No one wants to pay more for stamps. No one wants the services cut down. No one wants to see it take longer for mail or packages to get to them. And so people who jump on this issue, I think, really find it works.

Now, as a political issue, because the Democrats have started failing so badly in rural areas, and in many cases they're just not really there to make these effective arguments. But where you have states that are rural, you see senators from Vermont to the Dakotas to Montana and so on, really talking up this issue and aggressively trying to defend the Postal Service. We'd absolutely need more of it though.

**Ralph Nader:** We have this paradox, however, where DeJoy is undermining the system as we speak, delaying first class mail arrivals, producing a lot of complaints by people about the Postal Service, which isn't inherent in the Postal Service that historically has had a great reputation for reliability. But it's due to DeJoy, playing the Republican game. You undermine public services as the reason to argue for corporatizing them. What do you say?

**Robert Weissman:** Yeah, I think it may be the most extreme example ever, and that consequence flows in two ways. One is, okay, the case starts to be made that the Postal Service isn't very good; let's figure out ways that we progressively privatize it. But the other thing that happens is there are, in fact, competitors for a lot of the things that people would use the Postal Service for. And they have, partly by performance and partly by advertising, pretty good reputations. So if you've got a package, you're going to rely on the Postal Service, you're going to rely on UPS or FedEx. People increasingly are going to rely on the private services, particularly as, in fact, the Postal Service performance declines. There's just no reason for that. As you say, no one can match what the Postal Service does, not just in terms of those tens of thousands of post offices around the country, but there's a postal person coming to your house every day--every day, every house. That's incomparable. And you can't snap your fingers and turn that into the magic that it obviously is.

On the other hand, it's not impossible, and there's no reason at all that private competitors should be superior to the Postal Service in doing any of the delivery functions, let alone, even before we start talking about some of the new areas of the Postal Service could get into and outcompete private businesses. The idea that the private corporations are more efficient than government service is a complete lie. And where it turned out to be true, it's only because the corporations have typically sabotaged what the government agencies are able to do.

**Ralph Nader:** Well, listeners who want to contact the White House and tell Joe Biden to appoint two sterling new members of the Postal Services Board of Governors, which can then tip the balance and get a majority to fire Louis DeJoy, just call the White House opinion center or email the White House. They want to be able to say that they got a

pulse from the public about this, and it's not just an inside Washington nominee game.

In conclusion, Robert, how do people get in touch with your coalition and what kind of information can they get from the website?

**Robert Weissman:** Well, they can check us out at [citizen.org](http://citizen.org) and just look for information on the Postal Service and there's tons. Along with the other 80 organizations in the Save the Post Office Coalition, we succinctly laid out the case on DeJoy, but I think fulsomely too. So for people who want to get up to speed, it's easy to find that material and take action. But I do want to say also the point about taking action, Ralph, it's always true. But this is one in particular where this is available for the Biden administration to solve. And all they need... there's no reason in the world for them not to do it. They have been slow on it. So if we mount just a reasonable amount of political pressure, I'm quite optimistic they'll do it. So this is the case where calling the White House, calling a member of Congress, sending that email, will make a difference if enough of us do.

**Ralph Nader:** And to get the names of the groups in your coalition, see if our listeners belong to them, where do they get that list?

**Robert Weissman:** They can find the most recent letter from the Save the Post Office Coalition at [takeonwallst.com](http://takeonwallst.com), which is actually [takeonwallst.com](http://takeonwallst.com) and you'll get all the information on the Save the Post Office Coalition.

**Ralph Nader:** There you are, listeners. A little energy here and we can get the DeJoy forces off the backs of the Postal Service and its workers. We've been talking with Robert Weissman, civic advocate, public interest lawyer, President of Public Citizen, and leading the vanguard to resign Postmaster General Louis DeJoy and let the Postal Service thrive and grow and respond to its historical mission. Thank you, Robert.

**Robert Weissman:** It's great to be with you, guys. Thanks, Ralph. Thanks, Steve and David.

**Steve Skrovan:** That's our show. We want to thank our guests again, Dr. Susan Linn and Robert Weissman. For those of you listening on the radio, we're going to cut out now. But for you podcast listeners, stay tuned for some bonus material we call "The Wrap Up".

**David Feldman:** Subscribe to us on our *Ralph Nader Radio Hour* YouTube channel. And for Ralph's weekly column, it's free, go to [nader.org](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. And be sure to check out their online gift shop. You'll find books, posters, and "Flaming Pinto" magnets and mugs for all the tort fans in your life. That's at

store.tortmuseum.org.

**David Feldman:** To order your copy of the *Capitol Hill Citizen*, "Democracy Dies in Broad Daylight," go to [capitolhillcitizen.com](http://capitolhillcitizen.com).

**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. Go to [inspiringtweens.com](http://inspiringtweens.com) to see how family conversations can be elevated on fifty-four gripping topics.