

RALPH NADER RADIO HOUR EPISODE 497 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 the man of the hour, Ralph Nader. Hello, Ralph.

Ralph Nader: Hello, everybody.

Steve Skrovan: Our guest today, David Hemenway, is the Director of the Harvard Injury Control Research Center and the Harvard Youth Violence Prevention Center. He's been working on the problem of gun violence as a public health issue, which is the same approach Ralph took with auto safety. And it's not surprising because Professor Hemenway used to work with Ralph. When it came to car accidents, the problem was always framed as the "nut behind the wheel". Ralph approached it as an engineering problem – how do you make the cars less dangerous?

Professor Hemenway estimates that well over 300 citizens are shot every day in the United States, with likely 110 to 120 of them dying. 60% of those deaths are suicides. In a country that's bristling with firearms and with efforts to reduce the number of guns hamstrung by the NRA and distorted interpretations of the Second Amendment, Professor Hemenway asked the question, how can we learn to live with guns right now without dying from them? Our Substack and podcast subscribers get a bonus segment every week, "In Case You Haven't Heard", with Francesco DeSantis, who digs out the stories that don't get a lot of play in the mainstream press. Well, today, Francesco is going primetime with three news stories you may not have heard, and Ralph's commentary.

As always, somewhere in the middle, we'll check in with our indefatigable corporate crime reporter, Russell Mokhiber. But first, can we make guns safer with the same approach Ralph used to make automobiles safer? Feldo?

David Feldman: David Hemenway is an economist, Professor of Health Policy at Harvard University and Director of the Harvard Injury Control Research Center and the Harvard Youth Violence Prevention Center. He is a former Nader's Raider and he is the author of *Private Guns, Public Health* and *While We Were Sleeping: Success Stories in Injury and Violence Prevention*. Welcome to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*, David Hemenway.

David Hemenway: Thank you.

Ralph Nader: Welcome indeed, David. You were a graduate student working with us about a half century ago, and you've continued this work with many publications and building the Injury Prevention Group at the Harvard School of Public Health. You've been a leading supporter of what's called the public health approach to combating gun violence and gun-source suicides. Tell

us what that entails. That is a way to confirm the work you've done, that quite apart from law enforcement and gun safety and all that, there are a lot of ways to reduce the casualty tolls, right?

David Hemenway: That's exactly right. The key to the public health approach, is that it's broadening. It says, listen, once we decide as a society, this is a big problem, something's a big problem, there are so many things we can do, and there are so many entities that can help. And there's just so many examples that I tried to give of all the different things the government can do, all the different things that different organizations, from the faith community to universities to standard writing organizations to you name it, can do. And it's just sort of trying to make example after example, and just saying that if you're in, say, a hospital, that it's not just caring for people, but now finally, the hospitals are saying, oh, somebody is shot and they come in, this is the time when we can actually prevent them from going out and shooting somebody else or getting shot again.

The key about public health is, what we're trying to do is prevent, prevent, prevent, prevent. And too often in the United States, what we try to do is blame. And All blaming does is say, I don't have to do anything, it's somebody else's fault. The key phrase –public health approach - is let's make it easy for people to stay healthy and difficult for them to get sick and injured.

Ralph Nader: Give some of the many examples on prevention in recent decades that have worked, and why haven't they spread more widely?

David Hemenway: One of the big examples we get is from motor vehicles. The motor vehicle manufacturers in the 1940s and '50s were really trying to push that it's all the driver's fault. In some sense, they're correct because if you're looking at fault, because you can say if drivers drove perfectly, if drivers never made mistakes, they never got tired, they never got angry, they were never distracted, they never broke the law, if they never drove drunk or sped, there'd be almost no crashes. And if they never broke the law, there'd be very few fatalities.

But as you were able to show, and public health was pushing all the time, is that by changing the motor vehicle, by improving the roads, by improving the emergency medical system, you could reduce motor vehicle deaths by something like 90% over a 60, 70-year period per mile driven, without really improving drivers at all. You want to try to improve drivers, but that doesn't have to be the focus.

What typically all the successes in public health indicate is that the most effective and cost-effective way of reducing injuries is to go upstream and try to make it so that the world is safer. One of the big examples of the public health approach was in anesthesia, anesthesiology, whereas people were dying so often when they were under anesthesia that the malpractice premiums were the highest for that discipline of any in the world, of any other discipline and subspecialty. And what Harvard helped to change that by creating a system where it was hard for physicians to make mistakes. And when they started to make mistakes, basically bells and whistles would start ringing and they'd stop. So instead of the old way of let's blame this doctor, let's blame this nurse, and then we solve the problem, because you haven't, let's make it so that it's really easy to stay healthy.

I do a little work about obesity and ~~what~~ the public health approach says is if you want people not to be obese, try to make it so people can easily get really healthy, nutritious food; ~~easily~~, make it harder to get junk food; make it really easy to get ~~really~~ healthy activities, like healthy exercise; make it harder to be a couch potato. But in the United States for the last 40 years, we've done just the opposite, and not surprisingly, we have a huge obesity problem. You could blame people by saying you eat too much, or you could solve the problem by changing the environment, changing the incentives, changing how easy it is to do things.

Ralph Nader: That's a lot of the work you've done on using pricing differentiation; price bad things higher and price good things, or safer things lower. Let's talk about reducing gun violence. I guess half of the violent fatalities are suicides and half are crime. Is that roughly the breakdown?

David Hemenway: Not exactly. It's probably now about 60% are suicides. Suicides are always higher than homicides, and gun suicides are always higher than gun homicides.

Ralph Nader: Let's start with what you call a public health approach to reduce gun suicides, and the overwhelming evidence of what happens when guns are in the homes regarding suicide.

David Hemenway: Yeah. The evidence right now is so strong that a gun in the home increases the risk of suicides; it's stronger than the evidence was in the '60s when US Surgeon General C. Everett Koop said that cigarettes really cause cancer. And scores of studies show that when a gun is in the house, the people in the home—the gun owner, the gun owner's spouse, the gun owner's children—are something like three times more likely to die of a suicide than if there's no gun in the house.

And people don't understand this, but the evidence is there in terms of cohort studies following tens of millions of people over time in California, longitudinal case control studies comparing people who have died of suicide and people who look like them in most ways but didn't die of suicide. The difference is that people who died of suicide had a gun in the house and typically used it. The case fatality rate for guns is something like 90%. If you attempt suicide with a gun, you're almost certain to die. The case fatality rate for all the other methods is about 7%.

Ralph Nader: People probably have a hunch why, but just explain why that's the the case.

David Hemenway: It's not like most people have carefully planned the suicide. It's just things are going bad, and something just snaps—they get arrested, they get a divorce, they go get whatever, and they get really depressed, and for this time period, there's a real chance that they can attempt suicide. And if there's a gun around, they can use the gun, and then they're dead. And if there's no gun around, what can they do? Well, they can take 100 pills, but then we can save them. They can cut themselves, but then we can save them.

There's about 10% of people who have tried to kill themselves with a gun and shot themselves in the head or the heart and actually lived. And virtually all of them are so happy that they lived. We followed people who have attempted suicide in the most lethal ways possible and were able to survive somehow; they expected to die, but they didn't. Then 20 years later, they still haven't died in suicide because they haven't attempted suicide.

Ralph Nader: We're talking with David Hemenway, Professor of Health Policy. He's Director of the Harvard Injury Control Research Center, and a prolific author who is about to tell us something quite interesting. Listeners have heard endless discussions about the controversy regarding regulating guns, controlling guns, controlling ammunition, safety locks, the opposition of the NRA and its supporters. But background checks that are supported by many members of the NRA are still inadequate because of the more insistent members not wanting background checks.

Let's look at it from an interesting viewpoint. We have some listeners in Canada. Canada has a lot of guns. The US has a lot of gun ownership. Canadians like to hunt. There are people in the United States who like to hunt. We're neighbors. Tell us the difference in the way the laws are operating in Canada compared to the US, and what the difference is in terms of casualty tolls.

David Hemenway: So if you look not only at Canada, if you look at any of the other 30-plus high-income countries, every one; it's not like you have to look at Canada, Australia, New Zealand Japan, Korea, France or Sweden. They all have fewer guns, but particularly, it's not that they have no guns; it's that they don't have nearly as many handguns, and they don't have the military style weapons that we allow.

Secondly, the most important thing is they have strong regulations, and we don't. Almost all of them have licensing of all gun owners, just like we have licensing of car drivers. And they have registration of guns, just like we have registration of automobiles. And they have much lower rates of firearm problems.

So we did a study recently looking at US firearm homicide rate compared to all the other high-income countries. And in the United States, you have a higher chance that you will die in a gun homicide from guns than you do in any of these other countries. And it's not on average, like 50% higher or twice as high or 5 times as high, or 10 times as high. It's 25 times higher. There's so much blaming in this area.

Let's look at 5 to 14-year-olds who are in kindergarten through eighth grade. It's hard to blame them when they get shot and killed. Children in the United States, compared to children in Italy or Germany or any of the other high-income countries, have a 29 times higher chance of ending up at the end of the year dead from a firearm.

I teach in a public health school with lots of international students, and everybody knows this outside the United States. They just cannot understand why we allow this to happen. Adults in no other high-income country will allow this to happen yet the U.S. does. We've done studies of high school kids throughout the United States, and asked them, "Have you carried a gun?" Too many said, "yes." We asked, "Why have you carried a gun illegally?" And they responded, "Because we're afraid." "Why are you afraid?" "Because other kids have guns."

And then we say, "What kind of world do you want to live in? Do you want to live in a world like the United States where it's easy to get guns, where it's difficult to get guns, or where it's almost impossible to get guns if you are 15 years old?" And the overwhelming majority say, "We want to live in a world where it's almost impossible for teens like us to have guns." And even the majority of these boys who have illegally carried guns say they would like to live in a world where it's impossible for them and other teenagers in their community to get guns.

Ralph Nader: Yeah, but David, now it's easier than ever to get guns because they can make them. Tell us about the ghost gun situation.

David Hemenway: Ghost guns, ~~so these~~ are what is called privately manufactured firearms. And I want to talk about two types of ghost guns. One is these plastic, downloadable 3D guns. But the first I want to talk about is the more common and more, in a sense, in the short run, more dangerous guns. Basically, these are do-it-yourself homemade guns. Technical change has made it so it's much less expensive to get the parts to put together these guns. Online, you can get all these guns in kits. The guns don't cost that much to make. They can be made now in less than an hour, if you're at all competent. And if you make more guns, you can make them faster and faster and faster.

The key thing about why people want these guns, is, one, because they're not produced by a licensed manufacturer, so there is no serial number on these guns, which is why they're called ghost guns. They are untraceable. Who wants an untraceable gun? Huh.

The second thing is you don't need to go through a background check. So you have a gun that you can make in an hour, which looking at it, can't be distinguished from other Glock 19s and really is as effective as a Glock 19. You have a Glock 19 you didn't have to have a background check, and the gun is untraceable.

You can have an AR-15. You can make it. Online, it teaches you how to do this. There's help online on how to do this. You can make an AK-47. And the problem is these ghost guns are increasingly being used by people—like who would want these guns? Convicted felons, drug dealers, gun traffickers, gangs and some adolescents.

Ralph Nader: Teenagers.

David Hemenway: Yeah, and adolescents. The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF), said that police recovered 10,000 ghost guns in 2019, and that it's been increasing incredibly rapidly. These are tailor-made for the criminal market. The crazy people who tried to kidnap the Michigan governor, Gretchen Whitmer, had these ghost guns.

And so this is an enormous problem, because it's an increasing problem unless we figure out how to do something about it. And the other countries are going to do something about this because they're going to say these are guns, if you got to buy a kit, you have a gun. But the only way you can get the gun is to go to a licensed dealer and they will do a background check and they'll make sure that the guns have a serial number and are traceable. But we don't quite do that yet, or at least

the ATF is trying to make it so they're going to be traceable. But it's in the courts and God knows what's going to happen with the current court system.

Then there are other plastic guns which are a type of ghost gun. They are downloadable guns. They're 3D guns. All you need is a 3D printer, some plastic printing materials and the computer code about how to make this. The big problem with that is they are largely undetectable by metal detectors or at least they're very, very hard to detect. And we have all these metal detectors to try to prevent guns from going into the wrong places and these are going to be able to get through, which is going to make it really, really dangerous.

One of the things though is that these don't look like real guns. It's not like you see a plastic gun and say, Oh yeah, that's a Glock 19. No, it's a plastic gun and it's not nearly as reliable as a regular gun. You're not going to use it over and over and over and over again. If you want to shoot somebody, you got to get close to them and use it one or two times, and then it may not be working at all. It's much, much worse in terms of reliability and quality than the old Saturday Night Specials.

But something has to be done quickly. We can't wait and wait like we have done with climate change. It makes it harder and harder and harder. It's right now much more of a problem in states that have strong laws and low gun deaths. So in the United States, we have mostly the blue and the red states. Not 100%, but very, very close. The red states have lots of guns and weak laws and lots and lots and lots of gun deaths. The blue states have stronger laws and fewer guns and much lower gun deaths.

I live in Massachusetts. We have strong laws. We have many fewer gun deaths, not than the rest of the developed world, but compared to the other states in the United States. And where do criminals get their guns? They don't get them in Massachusetts. They get them from the states which have weak laws and lots of guns. But because just by making it harder for criminals to get those guns, we have fewer criminals using those guns. The fundamental law of economics and of psychology is if you don't want people to do something, make it harder. If you want people to do more, make it easier.

Ralph Nader: David, let's get back to Canada. Tell us what the Canadian system is regarding handguns and rifles compared to the US, and why gun owners in Canada, and there are a lot of them, have respected the system, and in the United States, there's heavy resistance.

David Hemenway: Well, there are gun owners in Canada who are like some NRA members. But in Canada, one of the key things, from my point of view is they have not only universal background checks, but real background checks. The background checks look ~~sort of~~ more like FBI background checks than United States. We have these background checks so if you buy a gun initially, as long as it's not a ghost gun, but if you get a gun initially in the United States, new guns, virtually everyone was supposed to go through a licensed dealer in which you would have a background check. And the background check basically says, "Yes, no, we'll send your data in to the National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS), and are you on this list of people who are a convicted felon or something else?" Basically the list is mostly convicted felons. And if the answer is "Yes," that's fine.

In Canada, they want to know things about you. The police come to your house all the time for domestic violence. They want to know. They typically are required to ask your spouse and your ex-spouse about you. You need two people to testify for you that you are a good citizen, quote, a "good" guy, as opposed to somebody who has anger problems. And it's very hard to get handguns.

It's easy to get these long guns to go hunting and to go target shooting, but because it's much more strongly regulated, the way criminals in Canada get their guns, how do they get them? They get them from the United States. The United States is a terrible neighbor to other countries. Not only are we allowing ourselves to kill each other, but how do Mexican criminals get their guns? They get them from the United States.

We had a research assistant from Jamaica, and he discovered that something like 85% of guns used in Jamaican crime came from three counties in Florida. So it's not hard to do. And it's not just, "Let's look at Canada." If we had the gun laws of any other high-income countries—had the gun laws of Israel or Switzerland, Italy, or Korea—we would do so much better. The evidence is overwhelming that having stronger gun laws is really helpful.

Ralph Nader: Does Canada have registration, licensing, storage requirements in the home?

David Hemenway: Yes. Canada has registration of handguns. They had registration of long guns for a while, and that died out because it's the handguns that are, in terms of crime, the real, real problem.

There are so many different countries, I'm trying to remember if Canada has certain things about training requirements which we don't. In the United States, you don't need to be trained to get a gun. In most states now, all you need to do is have passed a background check and you're allowed to carry guns in public. You're allowed to open carry, concealed carry. Canada requires, like in Massachusetts, a license to carry a concealed gun.

Ralph Nader: What about storage requirements at home to keep it away, keep guns away from kids in the house?

David Hemenway: I'm trying to remember Canada's requirements. I know we have storage requirements in Massachusetts, but there's too many countries, Ralph, that I get mixed up about it.

Ralph Nader: What are the storage requirements in Massachusetts?

David Hemenway: It just says that when you store your gun, you have to store it so that it can't be accessed by anybody else. It has to be stored unloaded and locked. That's what the NRA used to teach always, that all guns should be stored unloaded and locked up, with the ammunition kept separately.

Ralph Nader: Yeah, because there are several thousand deaths a year when 7, 8, 10-year-old kids get it out of their parents' closet and misfire. Horrible scenes are reported so often in the media. If

people want to know more about these success stories that we don't have time to cover, what's the website?

David Hemenway: They should just go into Amazon, and it's under my name, Hemenway The book is *While We Were Sleeping*. And it's about injury and violence prevention. The paperback edition on Amazon is about \$25.

Ralph Nader: Steve, David, Hannah, why don't you pitch in here.

Steve Skrovan: Professor Hemenway, say I'm a congressperson, and I know you're an expert on gun safety, and I want to take your approach and I call you into my office. And this is by way of summary of what we've talked about already. I want you to bullet point for me all of the things that I can put into this bill one by one, in ascending order of importance, that won't get me in trouble with Second Amendment absolutists.

David Hemenway: Okay. Well, everything will get you in trouble with the Second Amendment absolutists, but what I would try to convince them of is not here are the particular regulatory prohibitions that you should do, which you could find from the Brady Act (on firearm purchases) or the Everytown gun safety action fund, but here are some of the things the government can do that is not doing very well.

One is data. Government collects good data. We know that one of the reasons why there's such a success story in motor vehicles throughout the world is because we had good data, so we know what was going on. We finally have the National Violent Death Reporting System, but we don't have a good data system for nonfatals. Even in areas where we have good data or could have good data, such as tracing data, what kind of world is this where researchers aren't allowed to look at the tracing data of the police.

One of the things in the book *While We Were Sleeping*, all the successes, not only data mattered, but research mattered, using that data. And for 25 years in the United States, basically, the federal government did no research on this incredibly important public health problem. Finally, we're doing a little research, but a lot more funding of researchers is needed. Researchers go where the money is.

During the AIDS crisis, I was at Harvard, and there was no money for AIDS research in the beginning, and nobody was doing AIDS research, and suddenly there was money and everybody was doing it. We learned so much about AIDS, and there's a big reason why AIDS is not such a problem anymore. We really need lots more money for research to figure out what is happening, what works, what could work.

Again, just to give you a sense about why this is so important, in the motor vehicle area, one of the things we learned, for example, years ago was that 16-year-olds had a huge problem in terms of driving deaths and so what can you do? Ban all 16-year-olds? Or one of the things we learned from the research is that there were two periods where 16-year-olds were at the most risk, and that was at night and when other teenagers were in the car. And so Michigan said, "All right, we can let 16-year-olds drive, but not at night and not when other teenagers are in the car." And so they

had what is called graduated driver's licensing. It reduced deaths by 30%, which is pretty significant. Other states saw that, and we had data to show when other states had passed these laws, that they reduced deaths by about 20% to 40%. Subsequently, every state in the United States now has these graduated driver's license laws.

Ralph Nader: David?

David Feldman: In New Mexico, Governor Grisham announced a 30-day public health order banning the issue of firearm permits; I think she suspended the right to carry guns in public for 30 days. John Allen, a county sheriff in New Mexico is refusing to enforce this. Why are the police so resistant to common sense gun control?

David Hemenway: Let me talk about the difference between police and sheriffs. There's urban police and then there's rural sheriffs; there's lots of other things, but those are two. The urban police are typically—typically the police chiefs are good about reasonable gun laws, but they're also really reasonable about public health. Finally, they're sort of understanding. You hear these police chiefs saying, we can't arrest our way out of the problem. We have to do more. We have to work with the community. We have to work with the faith community. We have to give these people who were ex-gang members money to help work with the gangs, to help reduce the problem. We have to do lots of things. And they're pretty good.

But in the rural areas, they don't see the gang problem because there aren't many gangs. Rural areas have the big problem of intimate partner violence deaths. In both areas, interestingly, they don't quite understand that studies have been done on where police are getting shot. What is the best predictor of a state where a lot of police will get killed compared to another state where few police will get killed? And the answer is not crime. It's guns. In states where there's lots of guns and weak gun laws, police get killed.

Not surprisingly, those are the same states where police are killing civilians. On average, a police officer in the United States compared to a police officer in Germany is 30 times more likely to be murdered on the job. And a civilian in the United States compared to a civilian in Germany is 30 times more likely to be shot by a police officer and killed. And it all has to do with guns.

And the problem, is that guns have become part of the culture wars. And you had the reds and the blues, and instead of standing back and saying, "How can we work to solve these problems?" It's "My tribe likes the guns, and your tribes hates guns," which is not true at all and "We're going to stop anything that anybody wants to do to affect guns."

Ralph Nader: Hannah?

Hannah Feldman: You've spoken about preventing gun violence in terms of harm reduction. Could you explain harm reduction as a public health policy for listeners who might not be familiar? And also explain how it can be applied to preventing gun deaths and getting people to let go of guns as a culture war issue and accept it as an outcome.

David Hemenway: Right. Harm reduction has to do with... you're not trying to say, let's get rid of all cigarettes; you're trying to say, okay, people have the freedom if they want to buy cigarettes, they can, but to try to figure out ways to make it clear how dangerous cigarettes are, what alternatives are to cigarettes and so forth. One of the things like harm reduction, you're just trying to reduce the problem. So Cathy Barber in my group spends a lot of time with gunners, sort of sleeping with the enemy, if you will. She works with them about suicide. It turns out, as I mentioned, that if you have a gun in your house, you're incredibly at risk for suicide. And the gunners never understood that. They were always just thinking about gun safety and killing bad guys. For example, among other things, she went and talked to gun-carrying people who are the trainers in Utah, the red state, which is really the gun training capital of the United States and the world. And she said to them, "You're trying to do a good job reducing accidental gun death, but do you realize that for every accidental gun death in Utah, there are over 85 gun suicides? Eighty-five to one." And they said, "What? That's not right." And she said, "Raise your hand if you know someone who had died accidentally from a firearm," and a few hands go up. She says, "Raise your hand if you know someone who died in a gun suicide," and every hand goes up because there are all these old white guys and they're at really high risk for suicide, because if things go bad for them ever, and they go through a bad patch, they have a gun, and they know how to use it, and they use it.

And she said, "Can we do something about this? Can I help you create a module, maybe, to talk about the real problem about guns in Utah?" And they said, "Sure, let's work on it." And she created this module, and they love it. They think it's the best thing. And basically it's the friends don't let friends drive drunk approach. It says if your friend is going through a bad patch, he is getting divorced, he's drinking, he's talking crazy, it should be your responsibility and he should know it's your responsibility to—and these are their words—babysit the gun for a while until things get better. He has a new girlfriend, he's out of the woods, he gets his gun back. Because so many of gun suicides are pretty spontaneous. It's just overwhelming how many there are.

And then they said, "We should train this; everybody should get this training." And they said, "How can we do this?" And they said, "We could try to explain this to everybody; we know people in the legislature in Utah. We'll make it mandatory." So in Utah, it's mandatory if you teach training about concealed carry, you have to have a module about gun suicide. And that kind of thing is going to help because even though I mentioned the evidence is overwhelming, all the suicide experts in the United States finally understand now that a gun in the home increases the risk of suicide. The Army understands and the Veterans Administration understands it. But less than about 20% of people understand that. They think a gun is, "Oh, if you want to kill yourself, you will." And that's not what the evidence shows. The evidence is overwhelming.

Ralph Nader: We've been speaking with David Hemenway, Professor of Health Policy and Director of the Harvard Injury Control Research Center at Harvard University.

Before we end, for those of you who want to feel more optimistic about all these situations, the book is *While We Were Sleeping: Success Stories in Injury and Violence Prevention*. It describes more than 60 successes and over 30 heroes who have made the world safer. One last question. Are you finding more and more of your students interested in injury prevention? In other words, is there a growing core to carry on all over the country, and in the world? Because for many years,

injury prevention has not been at the top of the list for students who wanted to go into medicine or public health.

David Hemenway: That's right. What I can say is there's been an incredible increase in people interested in gun violence research. It used to be that five times a year someone would be asked by a publisher to review an article to see if it should get published or not and be a reviewer. Now, I would say at least once a week I get asked.

There are so many physicians now who care, who really understand that this is something that is very preventable. In a lot of areas, you can say, yes, we can prevent things, but here, all you have to do is look at any other high-income country and wonder, "They did it, why can't we do it?" You can look at states with strong laws versus states with weak laws and you'll see the evidence is there. If some people can do it, other people can. There's a way to do it. It's not like, oh my goodness, how are we ever going to figure out to stop little kids from drowning? Now we have fences around pools, so that's a really good thing. But what other things can we do? And it's hard, but in the gun area we know things that will work.

Ralph Nader: As a ~~one of~~ famous tort professor once said, "Better a guardrail on the highway than an ambulance in the valley below." Unfortunately, our time is up. We want to have you back, David, because there's much more to talk about – slips and falls, fire prevention and other areas that you've worked on for so many decades and inspired so many students. Thank you, Professor David Hemenway.

David Hemenway: Thank you.

Steve Skrovan: We've been speaking with David Hemenway. We will link to his work at ralphnaderradiohour.com.

Up next, Ralph has some comments about the child tax credit, and Francesco DeSantis and "In Case You Haven't Heard" will be coming up. 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, September 15, 2023. I'm Russell Mokhiber.

Food & Water Watch along with 12 other groups last week sued Biden's US Environmental Protection Agency over the agency's failure to regulate factory farm pollution under the Clean Water Act. The lawsuit follows EPA's denial last month of a 2017 petition calling on the EPA to initiate a rulemaking to overhaul its ineffective factory farm regulations. EPA elected instead to form a study group to make recommendations, delaying action until at least 2025, that is, if the agency decides to act at all. The lawsuit calls on the Ninth Circuit to reject EPA's denial and require it to immediately reconsider key reforms proposed in the 2017 petition.

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, Ralph and Hannah.

Before we get to Francesco DeSantis and our "In Case You Haven't Heard" segment, Ralph, you have a news item that you wanted to bring to light.

Ralph Nader: Yeah. In Wednesday's *Washington Post*, Steve, there was an article and an editorial on the child tax credit. And remember, that was passed at the height of the pandemic, and it cut child poverty almost in half. It amounted to about \$300 a month, sent to 61 million children regardless of their family's political background. It was up for extension in January 2022 and the Republicans blocked it. And to their detriment, the Democrats never made it a major campaign issue in 2022.

The issue has risen again. And the editorial in the *Washington Post* said, if we can extend this child tax credit, or if we can reimpose this child tax credit in Congress, it will reverse what the recent data showed, which is that child poverty doubled after the child tax credit was not renewed in January 2022.

It's something so simple, something that helps so many families; it increases consumer demand because studies have shown that most of this money was spent on the necessities of life. The Republicans are blocking it in Congress and not paying a political price. And that's the story of the Democratic Party. They don't make the Republicans, who are as cruel as any Republicans in history plus, pay a price for opposing health and safety for workers, opposing a restored inflation-adjusted minimum wage; not paying attention to climate violence, not getting more money domestically for public works repair in communities all over the country, while ~~and not simply~~ ballooning the military budget, which is so wasteful.

So it's important, for our listeners, if they ever interact with their members of Congress, to say, "You have an easy way to cut child poverty almost in half." And that has a human face to it, as we know, all over the country. Regardless, red states, blue states. Bring it to their attention, especially if you are in a Republican district.

Steve Skrovan: Yeah. It seems like an easy answer to what the far-right Congresspeople, the Matt Gaetzes of the world, who are railing against more government spending to point out that everything that you pointed out are the benefits of that.

Ralph Nader: Yeah. It's cruel, stupid, ignorant. These people should not be in Congress. They should be fired and replaced with people who put the interest of the American people ahead of the devouring interest of public budgets exhibited by corporate lobbyists swarming all over congressional offices as we speak.

David Feldman: What do you say to Republicans who maintain these child subsidies, make it harder for jobs to be filled, that Americans are staying home because of these earned income tax credits?

Ralph Nader: Yeah. That's totally false. It's been shown to be such in study after study. Whether people go to work or not are not relying on whether they get another \$300 to support their meager family budget on behalf of their children. This is what the Republicans get away with. It's called, in a euphemism, magical thinking. I call it ignorance blended with cruelty.

David Feldman: Now it's time for "In Case You Haven't Heard", with Francesco DeSantis.

Francesco DeSantis: A Princeton University study published at the end of August traces the effects of unconditional cash transfers on homelessness. Focusing on Vancouver, Canada, researchers gave homeless people \$7,500 Canadian. Conforming to the results of previous studies, the subjects used this money to get into housing. Yet, what was remarkable about this study is it showed this program actually saved taxpayers' money overall by relieving \$8,277 per subject by removing them from the shelter system.

Ralph Nader: Just another example, Francesco, that justice saves money. Justice means prevention. Justice means tackling problems before they fester and get worse and create much more expense for the society and the human beings involved.

Steve Skrovan: It sounds like a very similar dynamic to what you just described about the child tax credit.

Ralph Nader: Yes. It's been proven again and again. Obviously, if we have technology to require cleaner air and less toxics in the air; you're going to have less respiratory ailments, less cancer, less medical expense and less family anguish and fewer casualties. It's just a simple historical fact that is impeded by corporate power and greed.

Francesco DeSantis: From Axios, 15 senators have penned a letter to Secretary of State Anthony Blinken, urging him to stop the planned admission of Israel into the visa waiver program. This program allows the country's citizens to travel within the United States for 90 days without a visa.

Built into this program is a provision demanding US citizens in a given country are treated equally, which is not the case for Palestinian-Americans living in the West Bank. Israel claims that they are working to achieve compliance with this section of the law. However, this group of senators argue that "There is no provision in law that provides that a visa waiver country can discriminate against certain groups of US citizens for the first seven months of the program simply because a country claims they will treat all US citizens equally for the last five months."

Ralph Nader: A rare assertion of protection for American citizens in Israel and the West Bank by US senators, speaks for itself.

Francesco DeSantis: California Democrat Ro Khanna is making his pitch that President Biden should campaign on reelection on an anticorruption platform, per the *Huffington Post*. Khanna, who previously chaired the Bernie Sanders campaign in California, has authored a five-point plan consisting of "banning candidates for federal office from receiving donations from lobbyists or political action committees of any kind, banning members of Congress from trading stocks, limiting Supreme Court appointees to 18-year terms, imposing 12-year term limits on members of

Congress, and requiring federal judges and Supreme Court justices to adhere to a new and more robust code of ethics."

Beyond the hard policy, though, is a political point. Khanna argues, "What we cannot allow to happen is for a former president, twice impeached and four times indicted, to position himself as the outsider in the race."

Ralph Nader: All over the world, polls have shown that fighting against corruption is a winning electoral strategy, and the same is true in the United States. So I applaud Congressman Khanna, but I would also urge him to add another paragraph to his demand, and that is corporate corruption in our political economy.

Francesco DeSantis: On September 10th, Senator Richard Blumenthal sent a letter to the chair of the Federal Election Commission urging her to crack down on "Telemarketing calls and online scams that prey on Americans' goodwill and civic engagement," noting that a recent charity scam defrauded consumers of over \$150 million, while the recent, "Network of scam PACs took in 140 million."

Many speculate that Senator Blumenthal was spurred to act on this issue following the release of a documentary series on telemarketing scams focusing on the Civic Development Group, which raised vast sums for charities which only received between 10% and 15% of that money. The Civic Development Group itself has been shut down by the FTC.

A new piece in the *Insider* covers the clash of Conservative and Liberal populist senators JD Vance of Ohio and John Fetterman of Pennsylvania. The two have been collaborating on rail safety legislation following the East Palestine derailment, and we have covered the degeneration of this legislation on the show before. Now, Vance is turning his attention to banning mask mandates, which Fetterman calls "silly performance art," which is taking time and attention away from the stalled rail safety bill.

Steve Skrovan: All right, Ralph, last week we did the Procrastination Equation show with Professor Piers Steel, and we got a lot of good comments. Do you want to dive into that mailbag?

Ralph Nader: Yeah. There are comments and a bit of self-expressed satire as well.

Arlee Starr said, "I will put off listening to the rest of this for later. I've been putting off mowing my lawn, but am now inspired to do it now. Thank you."

Another comment by Adriana said, "I'm sure Ralph would be happy to know that I finally stopped procrastinating and divested from a big bank, moving my accounts to a credit union. Thanks, Ralph."

Ralph Nader: Thank you, Adriana, if more people did that.

Kathleen Keesler says to me, quote, "Thanks, Ralph. I'll be exploring *Capitol Hill Citizen Association* along with the *openthebooks.com*, and I'll stop procrastinating joining the community banking, financing co-ops. You aired a whole 730.5 hours ago. That's a month ago, right, Ralph?"

Ralph Nader: I'm glad you're exploring the Capitol Hill Citizen Association, because judging by the response we got to launching that group, a lot of people procrastinated.

Steve Skrovan: Just on the subject of procrastination, Ralph, of course I'm still on the picket lines for the Writers Guild and I like to take every opportunity to remind people that we are still on strike. It's been about 135 days. But the thought occurred to me that what these companies don't realize is most writers don't like to write because it's hard. And you, Ralph, know what it's like to face the blank page. And so having us march around and socialize, is kind of guilt-free procrastination. That's where our power lies. That's something that they don't understand.

Ralph Nader: That's very interesting.

Steve Skrovan: Yes.

Ralph Nader: Well, I remember the SAG-AFTRA union, and I'm on strike, and ~~I think~~ they should think of reaching more people than they're reaching right now. It's not enough just to have placards saying "on strike" with a slogan or two. You got to go after the big banks. You got to go after Apple, Microsoft, others, Sony, who have got big investments in Hollywood. Put the heat on them, and that will reach a lot more people.

Steve Skrovan: Well, that's actually what they've been doing; they are talking to all those Wall Street investors. That is the strategy from leadership. We don't get all the details of that, but those discussions are going on. And what the problem seems to be now is that the companies are having a hard time agreeing with each other, because you've got the legacy companies who have one business model and the tech companies who have a different business model, and it's very hard for them to come to an agreement; because they have different priorities, they can hold out longer. This is a possible opportunity to break the legacy companies off from the tech companies and just deal with them separately.

But that's what we're waiting on. It's in their court, and they really can't get their negotiations with each other together to agree on because, according to their alliance, they have to be unanimous, yet they're such disparate companies, it's hard for them to come to an agreement.

Ralph Nader: Are there any scabs yet?

David Feldman: Drew Barrymore. Didn't she halt it due to backlash? Delete this Feldman remark?

Steve Skrovan: Well, yeah.

David Feldman: The View got away with scabbing, in a way.

Steve Skrovan: Yeah, except they're starting to picket them. They're starting to picket another show called The Talk. Ralph, these are daytime talk shows that they claim don't really have writers. They kind of do, but it's still something that we're frowning on. And, yeah, Drew Barrymore has a talk show that is trying to get around that, too. But there has been unprecedented solidarity.

David Feldman: Are there laws—does Taft–Hartley forbid unions calling to boycott certain companies?

Ralph Nader: Yeah. It's called a secondary boycott. This is another terrible aspect of Taft–Hartley. It knocked out horizontal union collaboration.

David Feldman: It would be against the law for the union to say, cancel your subscriptions to Hulu and Netflix.

Ralph Nader: Well, it depends on how far they can go. Some of it is just free speech, and it's protected. But if they try to muscle it in any economic sense, then they would bump into Taft–Hartley.

Steve Skrovan: That's interesting.

Hannah Feldman: I had a question on a different topic. I don't know if we want to discuss it.

Steve Skrovan: Go ahead.

Hannah Feldman: There have been rumblings in the press about Republicans starting impeachment proceedings against President Biden. And my first instinct when I read it was, “Oh, come on, can we just, can we live?” And then I thought about it for a second and wondered what it would be like if our government had a more robust opposition, kind of like in the UK, where the prime minister shifts so frequently. I'm curious if you think there's anything to that or if our government just isn't built for that, and it would just end up bogging us down and we'd never get anything done, or would it make a more robust opposition possible?

Ralph Nader: Well, in a parliamentary system, they have a no confidence vote. And if there's a no confidence vote, the government falls and they got to have a new prime minister and new ministers. So they have a very sane way to do that. In our country, it's the neutron bomb, impeachment, and it's very rarely used; it's being used more in recent years for obvious reasons. This is a move by McCarthy because he wants to save his job, because it's demanded by about 25 crazies, the Freedom Caucus, who are controlling him on the budget and many other issues.

If he's smart, he's given them what they want. He's developed a panel, what he calls a panel to look into impeachment. He'll just deep-six it if he's smart. If he isn't, it may backfire on him the way it did on the Clinton impeachment, backfire against the Republicans.

Hannah Feldman: Do you think we'd benefit at all from justices, too, having a little less job security? Do you think maybe they're a little too comfortable? They know they're guaranteed their four years unless they lose –

Ralph Nader: Yeah, of course. Job security leads to autocracy. That's why the parliamentary system gets things done more. The reason why there are so many more social safety nets in Europe is the parliamentary system.

We have a filibuster, winner-take-all, crazy gridlock system. And so when we finally get, say, 2009, the Democrats have a good majority in the House and Senate, they still can't get anything done because there are so many ways to block the process, not only the filibuster.

David Feldman: Ralph, with the Constitution, is there a way, if we had a third party and a fourth party, couldn't we not become a parliamentary system, but resemble a parliamentary system if there were more parties?

Ralph Nader: Well, our system can install proportional representation. Like in Germany, if you get 5% or more of the vote, you get 5% or more of the members of parliament. If you get under five, you get nothing. That's the marker. In our country, you can get 49.9% of the vote and still lose everything. That's one reason why we have such a rigid system and such low voter turnout.

In Western Europe, they encourage voter turnout. You can get a party, it's not going to get 40% of the vote. But if we get 7% of the vote, we get some representation in Parliament. We're really tied in knots by the Founding Fathers' structure, and they never expected it to be cast in stone either. They were overly cautious. They were very worried about majority tyranny, so they installed minority tyranny.

Steve Skrovan: Yeah. It seems like there's an historical irony in that the Founders crafted this Constitution on the ideas of the European Enlightenment while Europe was a series of monarchies. And then after World War II, Europe, and being rebuilt, created these parliamentary systems that were an improvement on our system. And we have a hard time getting things done because ours is just, like you say, set in stone.

Ralph Nader: Well, it's getting omniscidal. It's not just delays. It's really getting omniscidal. Look how we're paralyzed on climate, on pandemic. Name a major problem we're addressing, and when you start to address it, you get a pushback like the GOP is doing on Biden's legislation. And nobody dares talk about rehauling the whole system because they think it's totally pie in the sky. People will laugh at you.

Steve Skrovan: And wasn't it Jefferson who said that there should be a revolution about every 20 years, something like that?

Ralph Nader: Yeah.

David Feldman: I think-Manifest Destiny is what screwed us over—I'm being serious—this idea that we had to colonize the entire continent and start bringing in territories as states. North Dakota, Wyoming, and Montana should be colonies. They shouldn't be states. I mean that. We should have left them as territories.

Ralph Nader: Well, they got two senators like California and New York.

David Feldman: They're not equal to us.

Ralph Nader: No. The interesting thing is, nobody in Congress is suggesting changing the system systemically, and nobody out there is. None of the third parties even have that in their plank. I never had it in a plank. People will laugh at you.

They have a fatalistic or an atavistic attitude, depending on the person. Atavistic means don't touch the Founding Fathers. And fatalistic is saying, Are you kidding? They can't even get healthcare through, and they're going to change the Constitution? It's harder to change our Constitution than any constitution in the world.

Hannah Feldman: Well, Ralph, counterpoint—I brought it up and no one laughed. It sparked a conversation. So maybe people should bring it up.

Ralph Nader: Yeah, you should.

Steve Skrovan: I want to thank our guest again, David Hemenway. 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 more stories from Francesco DeSantis, "In Case You Haven't Heard". A transcript of this program will appear on the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour* Substack site soon after the episode is posted.

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

Steve Skrovan: And guess what, people? The American Museum of Tort Law has gone virtual. Go to 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.

Steve Skrovan: And remember to continue the conversation after each show, go to the comments section at ralphnaderradiohour.com and post a comment or question on this week's episode. We 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* when our guests will be Toby Heaps, CEO and Editor-in-Chief of a special Canadian magazine, *Corporate Knights*. Thank you, Ralph.

Ralph Nader: Thank you, everybody. Those of you who are interested in the Capitol Hill Citizen Association and becoming a member Just go to capitolhillcitizen.com and you'll see the guidelines on how you can join others in order to be a factor in the way Congress operates. And get a copy of the *Capitol Hill Citizen* newspaper itself, print-only.