

RALPH NADER RADIO HOUR EPISODE 488 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 of course, the man of the hour. Ralph Nader. Hello, Ralph.

Ralph Nader: Hi. Coming up, you're gonna hear about how elections can be changed by an outpouring of the youth vote 18 to 29.

Steve Skrovan: That's right, Ralph. The Republican Party is intent on using the levers of power they control to smother democracy. And in that regard, 2023 is shaping up to be a banner year. According to the Brennan Center for Justice, in 32 different state legislatures, Republicans have introduced at least 150 bills that restrict access to the ballot box. These bills target a wide range of marginalized groups. But today, we're gonna be talking about young voters. States like Ohio, North Carolina, and Texas are explicitly targeting voters aged 18 to 29. However, there is one group fighting it back against this "generational gerrymandering," a nonpartisan organization called Civic Influencers.

Civic Influencers works hyper locally in targeted districts to amplify the voting power of young voters and engage newly eligible voters with a two-pronged approach. One, they hire and train young people on campuses to inspire their peers to vote. And two, they work with campus administrations to help make it easier for students to vote. Our guest today will be Maxim Thorne, activist educator, and chief executive of Civic Influencers.

We'll speak to him about their recent successes, their strategies for 2023-24, and what sets his group apart from other get-out-the-vote campaigns. Then Ralph is going to rifle through our listener questions and feedback, and he's also got some news items to discuss. And as always, somewhere in the middle, we'll check in with our relentless *Corporate Crime Reporter*, Russell Mokhiber. But first, let's fight back against generational gerrymandering with Maxim Thorne. David?

David Feldman: Maxim Thorne is a lawyer, activist, philanthropist, and a lecturer at Yale. He's worked with the NAACP, the Human Rights Campaign, the New Jersey Head Start Association, GLAAD (Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation), the Executive Committee of the Yale Law School and the Yale Alumni Task Force on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. He currently serves as chief executive of Civic Influencers, a nonpartisan organization dedicated to inspiring young people to make their voices heard and their votes count. Welcome to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*, Maxim Thorne.

Maxim Thorne: Thank you. It's great to be here.

Ralph Nader: Welcome indeed, Maxim. And listeners should know that Maxim and his colleagues are working on the project to get young voters to vote, and it could be decisive in the 2024 elections, especially in key states where they're concentrating. Four million 18-year-olds joined the United States voting ranks in 2021. So every year there are about four million new voters. Traditionally, the rate of voter turnout among young people from 18 to 29 has been the lowest of any age group. Maxim's group, the Civic Influencers are fanning out all over the country with volunteers in district after district to turn that around.

Before I ask you the first question, Maxim, I want to read a paragraph from the letter to the editor you sent to the *Washington Post*, which is how we learned about what you're doing. This is April 26th, 2023. "In Ohio, student identification no longer qualifies as a valid form of voter ID. In North Carolina, Republicans are seeking to follow in Ohio's footsteps. Texas is considering banning college polling stations and making voter fraud a felony.

"According to the Brennan Center for Justice, at least 150 bills restricting access to the ballot box have been introduced in 32 state legislatures this year." I might add, the vast majority are controlled by Republicans, the governor and legislature." Continuing, "These measures represent nothing less than "generational gerrymandering": the naked attempt to dilute the voting power of marginalized communities and, especially, young people." Now I take it the young people are from age 18 to 29, is that correct?

Maxim Thorne: That is correct.

Ralph Nader: And just for starters, because our listeners like to know, you've been doing this pretty intensively and are very much involved in the 2022 elections in swing states. Has NPR or PBS ever had you on?

Maxim Thorne: Not yet.

Ralph Nader: Not yet. Well, I don't know what they're waiting for. They have a lot of frivolous programs on.

Maxim Thorne: Well, I do want to address what you just said. Because it is puzzling to me until you realize how young people have been ignored for the most part since 1971, when the 26th Amendment was passed that lowered the voting age to 18. And they were basically disregarded as a political force other than the Vietnam War protest, until we get to [Barack] Obama and Hillary Clinton's primary election. But after 2012, the folks who did not miss their importance, which was basically the GOP, went all out to remove young people from being able to vote at the rates they had voted in 2008 and 2012 for Obama. So that in 2016, we had the full impact of voter suppression, what I call generational gerrymandering, affecting young people. But the media outlets were just missing this surgical attempt to stop young people from voting that started in 2013, the year after Obama's last victory. And it was not until 2018, and we were seeing some scandalous things like Florida banning polling sites from all college campuses, that we finally got the first *New York Times* article by Michael Wines, and then we got a *Washington Post* article and that finally started getting the attention. But in terms of broadcasters like NPR and so forth, they

have been very stoked to realize the power of this generation and also the right wing's attempt to just remove them from our democracy.

Ralph Nader: And you have a whole number of issues that they're very concerned about. It's not just turning out and being a good citizen. What are the some of the major issues you think will motivate them to turn out in greater numbers next year?

Maxim Thorne: They want climate change to be addressed. They want gun violence to be addressed. They don't want to lose constitutional rights like the right to have an abortion. They want to make sure, and it's incredibly important, that we are not trading off their values. We knew from our data of the last two years, because we do a lot of data-driven research, that young people were really focused on a lot of issues like I just mentioned. And they weren't gonna trade it off for gas prices and inflation. They were gonna vote their values, a whole coherent packet of values, and they were not gonna trade off as they saw other generations do. And that made us know that there was never gonna be a red tsunami if young people could help it. And they did help it.

Ralph Nader: Maxim, how about two other issues, student loan forgiveness issues, which are in the news. And young people are really rising up to support unions, aren't they?

Maxim Thorne: Yes, they are. Think about the older generations who were all about reducing their taxes, for a lot of folks who vote only pocketbook issues. And yet, those people don't realize that young people also have pocketbook issues. But it's not to give them access to more commodities, it's literally to get an education. And we have hamstrung this generation and hopefully we will not continue to do that to future generations. Because we are saying that they have to incur debt to just have access to a community college, to a trade school, to a vocational school and a technical school. And that debt, they don't see any way inside of paying it back given the state of the jobs and the rate of which they can be paid.

So one, they're arguing that they need to have their debt forgiven, and two, that they need to have access to jobs that pay them a living wage that would allow them to actually have a decent middle-class life, but at minimum be able to pay off the loans if you did not forgive it. And neither of those are coming true.

So, Ralph, the thing that really gets in my craw, where we think how important young people are to saving our democracy and voting on pro-democracy candidates and voting on those issues like climate change and abortion rights and LGBTQ rights, is what are we giving them? If you are not moving to relieve their student debt and you are not moving to allow them to organize so they get better paid jobs that allow them to live a decent life, you are not giving that most important part of our electorate what they need and what they're demanding.

Ralph Nader: I hope that in your educating aspect of these youngsters, you will open up the whole area of corporate control. Well over 75% of the American people think corporations have too much control over their lives. That's a lot of conservatives as well as liberals. Are you trying to get them earlier, because I'm sure that if you get kids early before they're 18, they're more likely to be predisposed to become active participants when they turn 18. So where are you in the 16-year-old vote and are you trying to reach even younger children as well?

Maxim Thorne: What you said should be eye-opening for everyone who is listening and participating in this conversation. The challenges of young people playing their rightful role in our democracy are huge. We have removed a lot of civics education, like the way they removed music and education from K through 12. We are paying catch up to help young people understand our federal system, our state government system and how it works. What is the judiciary, what's the executive, what's the legislative branch, both in the state and in the federal system. Because they don't get a lot of that now.

A lot of other organizations in the past—not that there were many, in fact, at one point, there were virtually none—focused on young people being engaged in voting. It was all about ballot access issues. How do we lower the barriers to help young people get to the ballot box? That's even before we had these horrible generational gerrymandering tactics like banning polling sites from college campuses in Florida and so forth.

However, the social science research is pretty clear. You can build a road to a store. But if no one wants what's in that store, they're not gonna take the road. And so we realized two years ago in 2021 that we needed to do a pivot. Yes, we will focus on ballot access issues, but you had to create the demand to vote. Why do you want to vote? And what we realize is when you flip that script and you say, “Do you want to protect the climate? Is your issue reproductive justice and freedom? Is your issue racial justice and mass incarceration or police violence? Is your issue LGBTQ, access to jobs and housing and healthcare? And if that is so, how can you move the needle towards what you would like to do?”

What we found is once they knew they wanted to fight to reform our criminal justice system, they wanted to fight to save the climate, they wanted to fight on ESG (environmental, social, and governance) issues, they wanted to fight on abortion rights, then they wanted to make sure they had a polling site on the campus to make it easy to vote. Then they wanted to make sure that their student IDs were compliant with voter IDs. Or they tried to fight as they're doing in Ohio, fight these ridiculous onerous restrictions on how young people are able to vote.

And so we focus both on demand, figuring out what young people care about and helping them connect that to the issues, and to voting, and then also lowering the barriers that they're facing to be able to vote. And that is making a dramatic difference.

Ralph Nader: We're talking with Maxim Thorne who is executive director of Civic Influencers and working on campuses all over the country. Well, young people are concerned about getting adequate health insurance. They know what redlining is. They know how hard it is to get housing. The price of tenancies is sky high. This is the only western so-called democracy that introduces young people to a massive life of debt at a very early age. In other countries, the tuition is part of the tax system. They don't push people out with tens of thousands of dollars out of college with tuition burdens.

So let's talk about generic issues here. What if we had universal voting? Your job would be minimized. You'd be talking about the content of the vote, the subject matter, the issues on the ballot, the candidates' positions, and record. In Australia and about 12 other countries, voting is a civic duty, and you can just go to vote, you have to vote, but you can put in your own name, you

can put in your Aunt Mamie's name. You just have to express yourself. And so they have over 90% turnout. In our country, we're lucky if we get over 60% turnout. Is part of your education, Maxim, to show what fundamental reforms are, so we don't have to spend endless time and money knocking on doors begging people to vote?

Maxim Thorne: Yes, we have long-term strategies and short-term existential strategies. I think one needs to have both tracks going. But the immediate existential threats to our democracy that certainly became apparent during the insurrection of January 6th and attempted coup, has really rocked our work so we see the need for what we're doing to get to scale urgently and to get to scale in a way that is most impactful.

In the past, we used to focus broadly on 50 states and the territories because everyone has a right to be able to vote if they're eligible. However, we have been faced with cunning and evil voter suppression, generational gerrymandering, blocking young people from voting like, as you mentioned, not allowing them to use their student ID cards.

And when you take into account students at a community college, at a trade technical and vocational school, who are among the most marginalized and disenfranchised, they don't have any other IDs. They don't have a driver's license. They tend to live in urban areas, for example. When you say, as it's happening in Ohio, you can't vote on Mondays. You literally are not allowed. Even if you have early voting, you can't vote the day before the Tuesday election. And by the way, Governor [Mike] DeWine of Ohio signed that gerrymandering law affecting young people on the anniversary of the insurrection in Washington, D.C. on January 6th of this year. So these people are deadly serious about removing young people from the voting rolls ~~rules~~.

What we are doing, and we've had to do given our limited budget, is then focus on those strategic places that young people can actually swing the election on the issues they care about. For example, in 2020, we did our analysis of congressional elections. ~~those elections~~ Some folks won by three votes, 109 votes, 133 votes, 333 votes. Last year in 2022, 34 races were won by less than 1%. So if you look at Colorado's third congressional district, Lauren Boebert had the tightest margin, 465 votes. John Duarte in California won by 565 votes.

One of the things that we use this data for and why we target young people, particularly young people of color, particularly young people who are community colleges, trade, technical, and vocational schools, is because we can show them the power of their vote. That's the marching band, the glee club, the gospel choir, the football team, the cheerleaders alone could swing that election. Their one dorm can swing that election. That is power. So when they think I don't have power, the margin was 565, the margin was 455, the margin was three votes. And when you go to state elections, it becomes very real and very doable.

While we do have long-term strategies about election reform and automatic voter registration, we have an immediate need to make sure that young people are voting where they can immediately get wins that make them happy. They can immediately get wins on people who agree to address climate change, people who agree to help them with student debt, people who agree to allow organizing of labor to get better wages and better healthcare.

Those are the things that have made the difference and stopped the red tsunami last year. I think that is what is the most disruptive thing we were forced to do – to think about where can we stop this precipice into an abyss of totalitarianism or abyss to fascism so that young people can actually have a chance to hold onto our democracy. So we show them the power of their votes at these tight margin races. And we have on our website all the various places that just a few votes by young people can make all the difference.

Ralph Nader: Give your website so our listeners can follow up and tell them what's on your website.

Maxim Thorne: Yes, thank you, Ralph. Our website is civicinfluencers.org. And you will see I think entertaining and fun tabs like Young People Can Swing Elections. And on that page, you'll actually see a state-by-state analysis of where young people can swing statewide races like for the US Senate or for the presidency, where they can swing house districts, where they can swing any other number of races.

We also have a tab called Mobilizing The Margins, which is literally showing you over time how margins of these election outcomes have been decreasing year after year. So the people are winning elections by three votes, 109 votes, 333 votes, 565 votes, 645 votes. And with your help you can actually shift the entire national conversation about voting in our democracy by focusing on movement building of young people – helping them connect the issues, whether it's climate change, healthcare, abortion rights, LGBTQ rights, mass incarceration – helping them see how to build a movement and not be only candidate focused.

I want to give you an example of what I'm saying. Candidates come and go. That should not be the end of our democracy because they came and went. Young people should be able to take that baton generation to generation to carry on a democracy. Two amazing victories I want to highlight in which unexpectedly both of these candidates increased their margin of victory. Elissa Slotkin in Michigan 8th district, now Michigan 7th, ~~her district in Michigan~~ or Abigail Spanberger in 7th district Virginia, or Katie Porter, California 47th district.

Why do I highlight this? Well, because Elissa Slotkin has a war chest of 5.8 million and Katie Porter also has a war chest of a million and both are now running for their respective US Senate seats in California and in Michigan. But both of those districts are highly competitive. Elissa pulled off an amazing win as did Katie Porter, but now that money is going to be put into their Senate races. One has to start from scratch to now build up whoever is gonna be running in those congressional districts.

That is not the way you hold onto democracy. We need a movement of young people that is maintained, that infrastructure that must be maintained that we did for community colleges, trade, technical and vocation schools, as well as other four-year campuses, that they continue to advocate on the issues they care about—women's right to choose, abortion rights, climate change, student debt. And that continues whichever candidate arises.

And the problem in our country is it is so candidate driven and not movement building driven that we have to always restart building our infrastructure. So our organization made a big pivot in 2021

that we are not cyclical. We keep our funded students on the ground year in and year out, federal election year or not a federal election year. So that they are constantly organizing even today to make sure that when we get to fall of this year and fall of 2024, they have been building momentum.

And that is why this year, 2023, there were amazing victories for the Supreme Court in Wisconsin, for the mayor of Chicago, for the victory in Colorado Springs, for the amazing victory in Tallahassee. It is because we are maintaining momentum even in off years. And people have to invest in this movement building young people's strategy right now if we're gonna have any chance in 2024.

Ralph Nader: And it's not just changing national election outcomes. But they go to the polls, they're gonna affect state and local outcomes as well. Before we get into how you actually organize the campus and events, Maxim, what do you do for the millions of young people who are not in college at all, not in community college technical schools, nor four years? How are you reaching them? Because their voting turnout sometimes is 10%, 12%.

Maxim Thorne: I agree. Part of our long-term strategy. The fact of the matter is, Ralph, we don't have the funds. Other than using social media, which I know that you have some challenges around, we don't do much because we can't. It was a huge disruption in the entire ecosystem when Civic Influencers decided we also had to include community colleges, trade, technical and vocational schools. I dare anyone to find me anyone else who's even taking on that.

And what we recognized in the COVID[-19] years is that we had the sharpest decline in four-year college enrollment. And a lot of even middle-class and upper middle-class people felt they were not gonna pay four-year college tuition for a Zoom year or two in college. What we actually had was—surprisingly to some, but not to us—a more white community college enrollment. And we also saw that now 60% of high school graduates are now going to trade, technical and vocational schools. That's 5.5 million students. So that is in a sense its own brand-new sphere of influence we could help young people access.

To get into the other millions who are not going on to any form of higher education is something that has to be done, but there is literally no funding. And given the existential threat that we are experiencing and also the ability that we can help these particular students make their voices heard in key areas where there's a chance of flipping or swinging or holding onto an election because the margins are so low, we focus that. But we do need to make sure that we are funding a long-term strategy as well. The truth is, right now, Ralph, we are trying to fund key locations. We've identified 34 house races alone. We've identified at least eight, probably more, Senate races. And we've had down-ballot races where young people can make the difference. And that's where pouring most of our resources in through 2024.

Ralph Nader: It's really amazing how after the civil rights battles obstructing African Americans and others from voting, and after the civil rights battles and the civil rights laws in the 1960s and '70s, most people thought that battle was over. That it's up to you to vote and no one's gonna obstruct you. Now along comes some of these right-wing corporate lawyers for the GOP and they

say, “Hey, we can develop all kinds of ways to harass, delay, expunge, purge, and not count votes.” And that's what a lot of the Republican governors are doing from Florida to Texas.

Governor [Greg] Abbott of Texas is one of the cruelest. He isn't taking ready federal funds to expand Medicaid and people are dying in Texas because they're poor and they can't have health insurance or they're getting sick and not treated. He just came out to make what he calls voter fraud a felony. In other words, people who vote who are not supposed to be voting or people who vote twice or three times. Well, we know it from the evidence, that's minuscule at all. But on the other hand, Governor Abbott is suppressing votes, obstructing votes, and there's no criminal penalty. It's just politics as usual. You know, that's what politicians do to win elections.

So I'm wondering, do you have a Southern strategy here? Because there's a pronounced difference in terms of access to the voting booth in Northern states. It's much freer, liberal, much more advanced voting days before an election, absentee voting, drop boxes. In the South, it's turning into a regimented, dictatorial type system that just happens to be aimed at low-income people and minorities. Do you have a Southern strategy here on the campuses?

Maxim Thorne: Yes, we do. I'm glad you asked me that because it's so important to understand the many dimensions of what Governor [Bill] Lee in Tennessee, what Governor Abbott, what Governor DeWine and what Governor [Ron] DeSantis and others are doing—to chill and frighten young voters from voting. So while it is ludicrous to think that we're gonna have felony charges and that we are going to criminalize voter registration. There have been so many attempts. We were represented in a lawsuit by the Marc Elias Law Group in Ohio around what Governor DeWine has done on the anniversary of January 6th to chill and prevent young people from voting. And similarly, in Tennessee, and similarly, in Texas. And of course we won a lawsuit, by the way, in Florida. Perkins Coie represented us where they banned polling sites. And it was the first case that where the federal court said that what they did violated the 26th Amendment. The 26th amendment lowered the voting age to 18 and said, you cannot discriminate in voting based on age. When you only banned polling sites from college campuses, you didn't ban them from nursing homes, you didn't ban them from McDonald's, you didn't ban them from Main Street, you were clearly using one criterion, age. That is what we know about college campuses, and we won that.

But here's the thing. There's a reason they're threatening felonies. Because it scares even our funded fellows, our Civic Influencers who are helping their peers organize and register to vote and get out the vote. One of our Fellows in Louisiana, who is passionate and she cares, and who is now at Georgetown Law School, tells me that she is terrified. She was terrified of continuing to do this work because if she got arrested - and it's unlikely, - but even if we said we would help, the chilling effect on young people who are trying to protect their future, especially young people of color whom the last thing they want is an infraction with the police and being arrested, is significant.

And I want your listeners to understand, it is not just the ludicrousness, but it's just trying to scare the hell out of young people from even registering to vote, and much less doing all the other things. We'd like organizers to build their strengths so they could argue for a better America and a better environment for themselves. And that is what these governors are doing, and we are helping them.

So besides trying to fund every year, regardless of whether it's a federal reduction or not, activists and organizers on these campuses, especially now, by the way, this is July. July and August are when these colleges, community colleges, four-year colleges, trade, technical and vocation schools hold their students' orientation. That is the best possible time for us to get in there and help them register to vote, understand where the polling sites are, understand what they're gonna be arguing for and advocating for over the next year. We got to get them now, not next year in 2024, but now to build that momentum and also to address the issues. Don't be afraid of all the things you're hearing cause we can help you.

And so we tried to put together a panel of lawyers that could actually help people in Texas, help people in North Carolina, Nevada, Arizona, Michigan, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, all the places that we know bad things could happen or are happening. And so our southern strategy is information, education, advocacy and organizing, maintaining funded students on these campuses year-round that could combat the level of fear and chilling effect that these governors want them to have.

Ralph Nader: And you also have to do it in two stages. You've got to register them, then you have to have them vote. You provide transportation, which is key. I always thought bringing people to vote as an event, which is what they do in Australia. They make it a festive event and have some refreshments and people go out to vote. Are you trying to also have events? I know when I was at school, when candidates came, it stirred things up and it encouraged people to vote. And are you having events where candidates come? And also, are you encouraging young people to run as candidates themselves at the local level, for example? It seems to me that's all part of a formula that gets youngsters more excited.

Maxim Thorne: Getting youngsters very excited is what we're all about and making it easy, entertaining, enjoyable and a duty—all of them. Events are important. And it could be musical events, right? Part of what we have to understand of the zeitgeist of Gen Z and younger millennials is they think of the world differently than Boomers or Gen X, etc. They connect music and politics in a different way. Probably they go back to the civil rights movement, Julian Bond and so forth, who connected music, or Harry Belafonte and Lena Horne, with movement building. This generation is doing it. We have to get on board with that. And they're doing it, I know, in ways that are different, with TikTok and Twitter and Snapchat, etc.

So we have been mastering how they communicate and how they engage. How are they messaging candidate information. The voter guides that were put out 10 years ago were radically different than what we do today. In those days, even in 2020, one published these tomes written by established journalists, multiple pages, and mailed them out. When we did our research on the 2020 voter guides, we learned that no one was reading it.

What do we do today? We create a series of TikTok videos. Seriously. We create 22-word Twitter things that build momentum, tell the story in your own way about why this is important to you or who is saying something that's aligned with you or not aligned with you, and making it bite-sized, making it not dense and doing it over time, but particularly closer to elections. It takes more time, it takes more creativity, more ingenuity to do it. But authentic speakers—it's not me, Ralph, and no offense because you are adored by so many, it's not you either. It is peer-to-peer

communications about candidates. It is peer-to-peer events that they invite various people from various points of views to come.

They're a little bit challenged because they have to operate in a nonpartisan. So you have to have a Republican and a Democrat or a Green Party, etc., all at the same time. And if one person refuses, which happens, it's a bit challenging. But they do have events that are fun like puppies at the polls or pizza at the polls or party at the polls. All of those things, we help fund folks. Because especially when you're dealing with less-resource, less-wealthy institutions like community colleges like trade, technical and vocations with the plumbing school, the massage school, the beauty school, they don't have resources to help people get to the polls. So we actually try to help them apply to get a polling site on campus, to get a shuttle.

And by the way, when you have redistricting and every time the lines change, your district changes, that's new information, new TikTok videos, new ways you have to share that information. And so being nimble, being fresh, being young, being fun is all part of why we win. And we won a lot in 2022 as you saw.

Ralph Nader: I like the way you're trying to get the students to have a higher estimate of their own significance. Because they go around basically in various verbal approaches. They're saying, "I'm a nobody. I don't count. Nobody listens to me." So you're trying to raise their own estimate of significance by saying, "Look, in these areas, you can swing the election. You can change the votes in Congress and state legislatures." David?

David Feldman: With Congressman Maxwell Frost, are you finding an appetite among young people to run for office and do young candidates bring out the youth vote?

Maxim Thorne: Brilliant question. Yes. And it should be obvious. My fear about our democracy, but I think we're gonna overcome it, because Maxwell Frost got elected as a young man, energizing, very charismatic, representing so many different constituencies, is that we are not listening to now the largest eligible voting bloc in America. 18- to 29-year-olds have surpassed Baby Boomers, folks. Twenty percent of this generation considers themselves in the LGBTQ spectrum. When I was in college, it was 3% or 10%. Now it's 20%.

Their values are dramatically different. But the candidates that are being presented do not represent the racial diversity, the gender diversity, the sexual orientation diversity that these young people are demanding to see themselves in it. And when they do see it, wow, outlier successes, Maxwell Frost's success. Look how close Mandela Barnes came in Wisconsin. No one was even funding that campaign. Look at the fact that so many people got gaslit to believe, and this is just a data point, that Lauren Boebert would win by a landslide, and she had the tightest margin of 565 votes last year that with the Pueblo Community College could have swung that election.

And that is what we need to have – younger candidates, diverse candidates that people can relate to in this generation. And I love the fact that we don't discriminate against the elderly, but young people certainly are discriminated against. I see polling sites going on and have gone on in my grandparents' building who are now deceased. But like in lower Manhattan, there was never not a polling site on Bleeker Street where senior citizens were living. But where young people are

like at Bard College, in Dutchess County, in New York, there is no polling site. They have been involved in lawsuits for years.

We have a generational gerrymandering problem. And if progressive people want to win and pro-democracy people want to win, we need to shift that and fund where young people congregate. They congregate at colleges, community colleges, trade, technical, vocational schools. And you don't have to argue the issues. They want to protect the climate. They want freedom. They want to be less anti-black racist. They want all the things we believe. It's just getting them the access to be able to vote.

Ralph Nader: Thank you very much. We're out of time. We've been speaking with Maxim Thorne, executive director of his group, Civic Influencers. You can go to civicinfluencers.org, get all kinds of detail, geographical, other kinds of opportunities to help get the vote out in the coming election and to set new traditions for civic and political responsibility on the part of the sovereign people. After all, that's where the Constitution places the power in our country. It starts with we the people, not we the Congress, or we the corporations. Thank you very much, Maxim, and good luck to you.

Maxim Thorne: Thank you so much. An honor.

Steve Skrovan: We've been speaking with Maxim Thorne. We will link to Civic Influencers at ralphnaderradiohour.com. Up next, Ralph will answer some of your listener questions and he's got some news items to go through too. 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, July 14, 2023, I'm Russell Mokhiber. AT&T, Verizon and other telecom giants have left behind a sprawling network of cables covered in toxic lead that stretches across the United States, under the water, and in the soil and on poles overhead. As the lead degrades, it is ending up in places where Americans live, work and play, according to a report in the *Wall Street Journal*. The lead can be found on the banks of the Mississippi River in Louisiana, the Detroit River in Michigan, the Willamette River in Oregon, and the Passaic River in New Jersey, according to the *Journal's* tests of samples from nearly 130 underwater-cable sites. The metal has tainted the soil at a popular fishing spot in New Iberia, Louisiana, at a playground in Wappingers Falls, New York, and in front of a school in suburban New Jersey. For the *Corporate Crime Reporter*, I'm Russell Mokhiber.

Steve Skrovan: Thank you, Russell. Welcome back to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*. I'm Steve Skrovan along with David Feldman and Ralph. And before we get to our long-awaited listener questions, Ralph, there were a few news items you wanted to comment on.

Ralph Nader: Yeah. First is good news. Due to the Chemical Weapons Convention of 1997, signed onto by 192 countries, the US has destroyed the last of its chemical weapons in Colorado. It's a very intricate and difficult process to do safely. And so, under this convention, there are no chemical weapons available for warfare. By way of saying treaties are a good idea. And in the last 15, 20 years, we've been withdrawing from treaties instead of developing treaties like cybersecurity treaties or public health pandemic, anti-pandemic treaties or consumer protection treaties.

So that's good news. The second is not enough attention's paid to the collateral consequences of the Iraq War. Instead of our government demanding an unconditional ceasefire and high-level negotiations, we are pumping the war up with more and more destructive weapons, which are gonna be reaching Russian territory and enlarging the prospects of a larger war. But the worst thing is that [Joe] Biden has decided to send cluster bombs, old ones with very high dud rates that can blow up kids because they look like little toys months and years later, to Ukraine.

We do not belong to the international treaty that bans the production and distribution of cluster bombs, nor does Russia, nor does China, nor does Israel, but most nations do. And now there's a big backlash against Biden doing this. They haven't been shipped yet. And I think public opinion may have a big sway. I know people who've been working to get rid of cluster bomb usage are gonna call—every time a Ukrainian child is blown up by one of these cluster bombs that Biden sends over, they're gonna call it the Biden bomb. So Biden better rethink this and withdraw. He's got a lot of allies in Western Europe that are telling him to do so.

By the way, in addition to sending cluster bombs to Ukraine, Biden is sending Abrams tanks whose shells are coated with depleted uranium that contaminated and caused cancer all over Ukraine. So, with friends like this, how does the Ukraine need enemies? They're gonna contaminate the country they're saying they're defending and they're gonna litterate with cluster bombs that as in Cambodia and Laos compliments of [Henry] Kissinger and [Richard] Nixon are still killing 200 to 300 children a year, who stumble on these in the fields or in the woods and they look like little candy bars, and they pick them up and it blows up on them.

The third item is we've been informed that there's going to be an imminent extradition of Julian Assange from a prison in England back to the United States. Imagine someone who exposes official government crimes, war crimes, the Fourth Amendment, snooping crimes, etc., is being extradited back by the criminal class itself that wants to keep engaging in these war crimes and violations of our Constitution. So keep a heads up on that forthcoming news story.

Another one is a study by Oxfam, the peace group out of England. They said if there is a 5% tax on the multi-millionaire and multi-billionaires on the planet – most of them are under taxed or not taxed at all – a 5% tax will raise \$1.7 trillion a year and take 2 billion people out of poverty and save endless lives and eliminate raw hunger. That 5% tax should be discussed all over on the media, in Congress and else elsewhere.

Another interesting story is coming out of Texas where Governor Abbott, who has just been reelected over Beto's [O'Rourke] candidacy, has usurped all the cities in towns in Texas who want to raise the minimum wage, which in Texas is still the federal \$7.25. So he's stripped them of their municipal autonomy on that subject and placed it in Austin where nothing's happening. He's not providing hundreds of thousands of poor Texans with Medicaid funds available from Washington. He now is pushing a law that will prevent municipalities from requiring water breaks for construction workers when the heat goes up to a 100 or 110 and can be lethal. And here he is, just been reelected. So the question here is, what's the matter with the voters? Not just the ones that don't turn out, but the ones that turn on to candidates who attack their fundamental values in health and safety and environmental protections.

So that's some of the news. I want to just direct attention of our listeners to the new edition of the *Capitol Hill Citizen*, 40 pages, print only, and it's full of articles you haven't read elsewhere. It reminds people of the criminal war in Iraq with interviews with Cindy Sheehan, Matthew Hoh and Dahr Jamail, who were very heroic in opposing George W Bush and Dick Cheney on that criminal war of aggression that has consequences to this day, taking over a million Iraqi lives.

We have proposed a college for members of Congress the way there's a naval war college or a defense university. Members of Congress are not aware of their full constitutional duties, of their authority to block runaway presidential military and appropriation action. There needs to be a little college nearby Congress that we have outlined.

We have articles on toxic inaction, no movement in Congress on the precautionary principle. An article on members of Congress are home for August, summon them to town meetings of your own citizens and focus on corporate power. Send them back saying to each other in the corridors on Capitol Hill, "Hey, something's going on back there. They're worried about corporate control of their lives. No kidding."

There's an article on the military-industrial congressional complex that's on a spending spree, a report on our new Incommunicados analysis of people not getting their calls or letters answered by members of Congress and people in the Executive Branch, which we're gonna talk about in an upcoming program. We have an article on Cornel West, taking on the corporate duopoly.

An article by an MIT professor showing how regulation of corporations' health and safety can create jobs. Somebody's got to produce airbags, seat belts, toxic detection equipment in the workplace and so on. Couple very critical articles by people who know what they're talking about on nuclear power. An article by one of the best experts, Tom Devine, on how Congress needs to protect government whistleblowers.

And listen to this one, an effort by towns in Delaware to give corporations the right to vote, not just property owners on tax property issues. They want to give corporations the right to vote like people. And the Common Cause leader in Delaware is interviewed, and the title of the interview is, *Should McDonald's, Verizon and AutoZone Have The Right To Vote?* And she's all over the legislature telling them no. But it shows the brazen nature of corporate power. Now they want the right to vote so they can create all kinds of thousands of subsidiaries and dominate elections. It's not ironic that it started in Delaware where Joe Biden comes from. Delaware is the corporate haven for giant corporations to charter and have very permissive laws.

So you can get this *Capitol Hill Citizen* with a nice humorous article by our own Steve Skrovan by going to capitolhillcitizen.com. It's 40 pages. It's sent to you first class. It only costs \$5. Some people are buying numerous ones for their friends and neighbors. The reaction of people who read this newspaper has been spectacular, but we have to get the word out.

Steve Skrovan: Okay, thanks for that, Ralph. Now let's dip into the mail bag. Ralph, let us know what's going on from our listeners.

Ralph Nader: Well, one listener, Rosanne Russillo writes, “Dear Mr. Nader, my bank recently used part of a refund I received to my credit card account original form of payment from an online vendor to pay off my credit balance, which was neither due nor overdue. The original purchase was over \$2,000, has been paid off eight months before. I contend the bank should not have usurped my ability to decide what happened to that money, much like if it had been a cash refund. While I'm able to regroup financially, what if I needed that money to replace the needed item, pay rent, get medicine, or buy food? With consumers being forced to purchase more items online, this vulturous bank behavior is bound to become more prevalent and financially disempower the individual. Is there anything we can do about it?”

Well, there is. You can buy more products and services by using cash and check. We have a project on that, and we'll give you the contact number. That's one. And the second one is reporting this misbehavior to the bank commissioner of your state. This is not shades of gray. This is a raw grab and they're likely to get a reprimand from the bank commissioners who are supposed to regulate them. It's an easy one for the bank commissioners. Thank you very much, Roseanne.

Another one is from Donald Klepack. “This is a question to the entire Ralph Nader audience. Could the military-industrial media intelligence complex, the exact same people,” he says, “be a tool that not only makes war invisible but be also used domestically to distract us along economic and racial and social differences.”

My answer is of course. You first start with the tens of millions of dollars in the propaganda budget for domestic purposes by the Pentagon. They have people all over the country. And who are their allies? Well, Raytheon, General Dynamics, Boeing, Lockheed Martin, you know, the weapons of mass destruction corporations, and they have had undue influence over the American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars as the Veterans for Peace organization is pointed out from time to time, and they get almost 90% ditto heading by the mass commercial media. You don't hear the other side. So the answer to your question is of course.

Another one is a good one to read. It's by Howie Lisnoff. “The mass media folded its tent and disappeared into the night. The latter has been expanded with Ukraine. I had a comment posted and removed from the *New York Times* that made an anti-war statement about the war in Ukraine. It's awful and it involves two nuclear powers.”

You're right. It is awful. In fact, there was an op-ed criticizing the way we are approaching the war in Ukraine by a very prominent academic. It was accepted and then pulled by the *New York Times* saying they had a columnist who's gonna write something like that. We haven't seen that since. Yeah, there is a party line. It beckons the terrible party lines on the war in Ukraine, the war on Libya, the war in Afghanistan. There are very few independent media sites, and I must say on Ukraine, some of them have the same problem. We don't want to continue this war in Ukraine to the last Ukrainian family. We have to move for an unconditional ceasefire and high-level negotiations. Otherwise, get ready for year after year of gridlocked warfare, trench warfare. You don't believe it? Look at Syria.

Okay. It's one by Steve Shuttleworth. This is a good one, especially. “Every time I hear the word Boeing, I think of the time in 1997 when I was an employee of McDonnell-Douglas Corporation.

It was announced that Boeing was pursuing a merger with the McDonnell-Douglas Corporation, making the only two commercial aircraft manufacturers one company. I assumed that it would never happen as the [Bill] Clinton administration would surely put the brakes on the plan in order to avoid Boeing getting monopoly power over the world's commercial airline manufacturers. Their only remaining competition being Airbus in Europe.

“The response from Washington instead was absolute silence. As with any monopoly, the history of the 737 Max resulted in minimal financial damage to Boeing and with no competition, no interruption in its winning contracts with the federal government. Read the 737 Max, according to Wikipedia, “During the certification process, the FAA delegated many evaluations to Boeing allowing the manufacturer to review their own product.” This is the same heartwarming value to the reader as the knowledge that nuclear power plants are now performing their own safety inspections, allowing the government to save valuable taxpayer dollars. What could go wrong?” Thank you for that comment, Steve.

And Romanas Buskus. “Let's face it. Our government's for sale and everybody knows it. There's only one issue really matters: 100% campaign finance reform. Without that, nothing is gonna change. We need publicly funded elections to get our government back. Then people will want to do public service instead of becoming a power-drunk millionaire. I would like to hear a podcast on that. I read that it would cost the taxpayer about \$4 billion to \$6 billion a year to publicly fund elections. That's a small price to put our government back.” I might add, Romanas, that public funding of public campaigns is one of the greatest investments our democracy could ever make in terms of return on that expenditure, and it would certainly remove a good part of our government being for sale or for rent, incumbent by incumbent. Thank you.

Then there's one by Robert Travaline. “When I was young and ill-informed, I was sent to the other side of the world to fight a war profiteer's war. Now I'm a radical ultra-left-wing liberal. I was taught by my society that maximizing wealth was the message of God, of country, and its leadership, that people didn't matter and were on their own. This is not a good country, and it must change.” That speaks for itself. Thank you very much.

Steve Skrovan: Thank you for your questions and feedback. You know, we read them all. I want to thank our guest again, Maxim Thorne. 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” which features Francesco DeSantis and *In Case You Haven't Heard*. We've got a lot more from Maxim Thorne and a lot more from you. A transcript of this program will appear on the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour* Substack site soon after the episode's posted.

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. For more from Russell Mokhiber, go to corporatecrimereporter.com. 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.

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.

Hannah Feldman: Join us next week on the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*. We'll be discussing the Incommunicados report with our good friend Bruce Fein. Thank you, Ralph.

Ralph Nader: Thank you, everybody. And listeners, become a Capitol Hill citizen. Obtain the brand-new issue, 40 pages in print only of the *Capitol Hill Citizen* by going to capitolhillcitizen.com. You'll be enthralled, stimulated, and perhaps motivated to become a Capitol Hill citizen, about which we will talk more in coming programs.