

RALPH NADER RADIO HOUR EPISODE 493 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: Hello.

Steve Skrovan: I hope you're doing okay. And I hope the man of the hour is doing okay, Ralph Nader. Hello, Ralph. What's going on?

Ralph Nader: Hello, everybody. Well, our listeners know that we want to have more Capitol Hill citizens monitoring Congress, participating in congressional issues, and holding town meetings back home, where they summon formally their senators and representatives to respond to the people's agenda. And critical of that is the *Capitol Hill Citizen* newspaper, print-only. The July-August issue is out—forty pages packed with all kinds of information on all kinds of subjects. You can get it by going to capitolhillcitizen.com, with a donation of \$5 or more, and get it back to you immediately, first-class mail. And once you do that, you'll see whether you want to be a Capitol Hill citizen, because, as we've said again and again, so many of the redirections and reforms in our country either have to go through Congress or are being blocked by a corporate-dominated Congress. Once you agree to become a Capitol Hill citizen, a personal decision by you, we'll talk about bringing this together in an aggregate manner with a Capitol Hill citizen organization.

Steve Skrovan: Thanks for that, Ralph. And actually, our topic for today is nuclear power. And in the *Capitol Hill Citizen*, the latest issue is a pretty good takedown of the new Oliver Stone movie about nuclear, which is promoting nuclear. So after you hear our guest today, you'll want to look that up, too.

Environmental advocates and concerned citizens agree that we have to do something about the climate crisis, urgently. But some environmentalists are backing a controversial solution – nuclear power. Our old friend, nuclear power. Previously on our show, we've covered the troubling resurgence of nuclear power and its rebranding as new nuclear. Today, we're talking about the problems with nuclear technology, the fusion of old-school technology with the new class of disruptive startup execs, and why we shouldn't believe the hype about nuclear boosters with our first guest, Professor M.V. Ramana, an expert on nuclear technology. After that, we'll welcome back grassroots organizer Paul Deslauriers to discuss his latest book, *Common Sense*. We've spoken to Mr. Deslauriers about his work fighting against corporate influence in Maui, today we'll speak to him about his new book, *How to Stimulate and Sustain Systemic Change in our Communities and How to Reclaim Democracy*. And just to note, we recorded this interview with Mr. Deslauriers before the devastating wildfires that occurred on Maui over the past week.

As always, somewhere in the middle, we'll check in with our steadfast corporate crime reporter, Russell Mokhiber. But first, should we place the future of our planet in the hands of people whose ethos is to move fast and break things? Probably not. David?

David Feldman: M.V. Ramana is the Simons Chair in Disarmament, Global and Human Security, and a professor at the School of Public Policy and Global Affairs, University of British Columbia. Professor Ramana is the author of *The Power of Promise: Examining Nuclear Energy in India*, and is a member of the International Panel on Fissile Materials, the International Nuclear Risk Assessment Group, and the team that produces the annual *World Nuclear Industry Status Report*. Welcome to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*, Professor M.V. Ramana.

M.V. Ramana: Thank you very much. It's a great pleasure and honor to be on your show.

Ralph Nader: Yes. Welcome indeed, professor. We're going to cover, listeners, the present state of nuclear power, the so-called new small modular reactors that are being proposed and the role of Bill Gates in this effort, as well as the fraud that is nuclear fusion and why there's so much support in Congress for both nuclear fission reactors and nuclear fusion projects, all of which are heavily subsidized by you, the taxpayer. As I've said in prior programs, nuclear power today—unnecessary, unsafe, uninsurable, uncompetitive, irresponsible, very secretive, and not willing to suffer the verdict of the marketplace, which means that it demands from Congress regular bailouts and huge surplus cost overrun support.

So tell us first about how uncompetitive nuclear power is, with examples that you've given from the construction efforts in Georgia and Florida, and how new nuclear electricity prices compare with solar and wind at the present time.

M.V. Ramana: Yeah, thank you. We've known for a very long time that nuclear energy is a very costly way of generating electricity. And the fundamental reason for that is we are trying to boil water using a very hazardous process. So to try and contain all the radioactive materials that are produced during the efficient? process, you have to put a lot of safeguards into a nuclear reactor and that drives up the cost. Unlike many other energy technologies, nuclear power has the unique distinction of going up in price compared to earlier periods. And you can understand this as a function of the fact that when you gain more experience with nuclear reactors, you realize there are more pathways to accidents. And once you figure out there's going to be a pathway to an accident, you have to put in some mechanism to try and prevent or at least lower the probability of such an accident. And that drives up the cost.

The latest generation of nuclear reactors that have been built around the world have been among the most expensive. In the United States, the final cost of the Vogtle plant in Georgia was close to \$35 billion, and it's still increasing at this point. When the project started, they were talking about \$14 billion. But if you go back even further into history, in the early 2000s, when we were promised a nuclear renaissance, the company, Westinghouse, that was developing the AP1000 reactors that are built in Georgia, along with all the nuclear lobbyists, were telling Congress that this was expected to cost maybe \$5 billion, but actually, when construction started, the cost had

already increased to \$14 billion, and by the time construction ended, the cost went up to about \$35 billion.

A sister project for this, the VC Summer project, was being built in South Carolina, and that spent over \$9 billion before the state decided to cancel it. Essentially, the people/the ratepayers in the state of South Carolina, have paid for essentially a big hole in the ground. One reason why these two projects went ahead was because the two state legislatures [GA and SC] actually found a way to start charging consumers before the plants were built. So consumers were paying for a future electricity that they were going to get. But in the state of South Carolina, they never got that electricity. So that was the scam under which these projects actually went ahead.

And if you now compare this to other sources of power, the high cost of building the reactors translates into a high cost of electricity. There's a company on Wall Street called Lazard that does an annual estimate of costs from different sources of power, and it usually puts nuclear power at around \$160 per megawatt hour. In comparison, solar and wind are roughly around \$40 per megawatt hour. And the cost of solar and wind projects has been falling consistently over the last decade. So nuclear power is really completely uneconomical.

And this is true not just in the United States, but in other parts of the world. For example, the reactors that are being built in Finland and in France and the one that's being constructed in the UK, are all among the most expensive nuclear reactors. And the overall uncompetitiveness of nuclear power around the world is reflected by the fact that if you look at the share of global electricity produced by nuclear power plants around the world, that fraction reached its maximum in the mid-1990s, around 17.5%, roughly, and it's been declining consistently. Last year (2022) it was just about 9%.

Ralph Nader: Not only is it not competitive all over the world with wind and solar, not to mention conservation of energy, which is the most immediate way to reduce energy consumption, and the global warming that results from that, but solar power and wind power do not leave you with thousands of years of deadly radioactive waste for which there's really no safe repository yet. They're all in temporary casks or temporary tanks underground in various places around the world. And solar energy and wind power are not national security risks. Nuclear power can be sabotaged. There's very little defense against aerial weapons, for example. And plutonium is a deadly material that can be used for nuclear weapons.

So let's go to the promise. I remember when I was spending the summer at Oak Ridge National Laboratory in the 1960s, they were talking about smaller nuclear reactors. So tell us about the so-called small modular reactors, none of which can be built without full taxpayer guarantees or subsidies, and Bill Gates's role here.

M.V. Ramana: Yeah. So the points that you mentioned about the undesirable aspects of nuclear power are very important. The three, which are most important, are the risk of accidents the fact that it produce radioactive waste for which we don't have a demonstrated solution anywhere in the world, and the fact that it is closely linked with nuclear weapons because all nuclear reactors produce plutonium, and therefore they are all capable of producing material that can be used in nuclear weapons. All of these are fundamental attributes of nuclear power.

When you talk about smaller reactors, that, again, has been a long-term promise. And the main reason why the nuclear industry started talking about smaller reactors way back in the 1950s and '60s was because the larger nuclear power plants were seen as incompatible with smaller electricity cooperative companies, rural electricity cooperatives, for example, in the United States, or with smaller developing countries, which don't have a sufficiently large electricity grid in order to adequately run a large plant. A typical rule of thumb in electricity planning is that no single unit in your electricity grid should provide more than 10% to 15% of the electricity capacity in the grid. Once you go above that, you start creating instabilities in case that particular plant goes down.

This was a constraint for them. So the nuclear industry was trying to say, it could make smaller reactors and sell it to other countries around the world. The problem with smaller plants is that when you go smaller, the costs per unit of capacity actually go up. To put it differently, when you build plants that are larger, the cost per unit of electricity capacity or energy production go down because of what we call economies of scale. We don't need five times as much concrete or five times as many workers to operate a plant or to build a plant that generates five times as much electricity, but you can generate five times as much revenue through that plant. That's the reason why the nuclear industry, which initially started building smaller plants, started building bigger and bigger plants.

What has happened now is that because of the very high cost that I talked about, in the case of Vogtle and so on, it's very apparent that no utility in the United States can afford to build one of these. The \$30/\$40 billion price tags for a large nuclear reactor are challenging even for the largest nuclear utilities, which have typical market capitalizations in the tens of billions of dollars. At this point, their ratings on Wall Street and so on start going down. This is why the nuclear industry has pivoted to talking about smaller reactors. But smaller reactors, as I mentioned, are going to be even more expensive per unit of generation capacity. So there's no way this nuclear industry is actually going to be able to make it competitive, but the industry has to keep promising something, and this has been their latest promise. Unfortunately, or fortunately, a number of very prominent people, Bill Gates being one of them, more recently Sam Altman, have been behind this hype about smaller, newer kinds of nuclear reactors. And the industry has two or three answers to this. One is to build smaller; the other is to say the problems with nuclear power are with the conventional design of nuclear reactors that have been built around the world, the so-called light-water reactors. And by building other kinds of designs, we will be able to overcome these problems of economics, of safety and so on and so forth.

So different companies are peddling different kinds of designs. There are high-temperature gas-cooled reactor designs; there are molten sodium-cooled fast neutron reactor designs; there are molten salt reactor designs. But all of them have different problems. One way to think about it is to remember that all nuclear power plants have those same fundamental problems that I mentioned earlier, which is the risk of accidents, the fact that they produce radioactive waste, and the fact that they produce plutonium which can be used in nuclear reactors. You can try to address one of these problems, but by doing so, typically you will make the other problems worse because the technical requirements to try and deal with any of these challenges are very different.

In the case of the sodium-cooled fast neutron reactors that TerraPower, the company that Bill Gates has been backing, has built, would produce a lesser amount of radioactive waste per unit of electricity generated, but they have unique safety challenges, so-called core disassembly accidents, and they have to use much more concentrated fissile material in their cores, which means that they are more vulnerable to nuclear proliferation. Lastly, because of the use of molten sodium to cool these reactors, which is necessary because these are very concentrated sources of heat, the molten sodium is not something which behaves well when it interacts with air or water. There have been constant problems with leaks in many of these reactors because of various chemical interactions and these leaks can lead to fires. So, the sodium-cooled reactors that have been built around the world have spotty records.

Ralph Nader: I think by now our listeners are saying, how could such an unreasonable technology constantly command the attention and support of the US Congress? There's a link here, which Professor Ramana is going to describe, between the nuclear power civilian and the nuclear weapons industrial complex, and the fact that some totally ignorant environmental groups, whether by compromise or by lack of knowledge, are basically signaling that we will need nuclear power plants because they don't produce global warming gases, forgetting by the way, how the nuclear fuel cycle is fired up by coal at its earliest stages. And that has neutralized some of the civic community, which in past decades, was unified against nuclear power plants. Why are some of these environmental groups buying into building more nuclear reactors and not criticizing the nuclear fusion connection to military weapon upgrades in the nuclear field?

M.V. Ramana: Yeah. I can only speculate on this, to be honest, but it seems inconceivable to me that anybody who has any sense of history would think about nuclear power, either the fission version or the hypothetical future nuclear fusion version, as environmentally sustainable sources of electricity. But the best case one can say about them, and some of them may be entirely sincere in this belief that we need every possible means of fighting climate change as long as nuclear power does not produce carbon emissions. And because a nuclear reactor doesn't burn any fossil fuels at the point of generating electricity, there is this feeling that we need to be doing this—they use a lot of pithy metaphors which really don't mean much—things like we need every tool on the table or all hands on the deck or some meaningless thing of that sort.

But as Peter Bradford, who used to be a commissioner at the Nuclear Regulatory Commission and also member of various electricity regulatory systems around the United States, has quite appropriately said, "If you want to fight world hunger, you can't be investing in or trying to give people caviar." Nuclear fission is a very expensive way. We need to think about emissions, but also about cost and time. Because what we are lacking in climate change today, simply because we've been so late in trying to act on it, is the fact of urgency. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) puts out report after report saying how high the emissions are and how rapidly emissions have to be decreased if we have even a fighting chance of meeting a 1.5 degree Celsius target.

By putting off this kind of action, those calls are becoming more and more desperate. And that desperation is probably what is driving some of these groups to say, "Well, let's make friends with everybody," and so on and so forth. But the challenge there is that every dollar we spend on nuclear power, either the fission variety or the fusion variety, is a dollar that's not spent on renewables, on

energy efficiency, on other ways of trying to deal with the problems of the variability of renewable energy.

Ralph Nader: That's the most powerful practical argument. Instead of spending hundreds of billions of dollars on these boondoggles, which are backed by the military-industrial complex and they don't want nuclear arms control treaties, so they're building a new generation of nuclear weapons. Instead, put it in conservation at the community level. Make buildings, schools, homes more efficient, creating jobs. Put it in solar energy, passive and active. Put it in wind power. Instead, they're putting it down a deadly rat hole that keeps getting bigger and bigger. And one of the aspects of the whole nuclear power complex is secrecy and antidemocratic policymaking. They don't want to have congressional open hearings with cross-examination of their preposterous assertions. They don't want to open their books. They don't want to talk about what the ratepayer is going to have to pay and the taxpayer is going to have to pay to bail them out. So it is what can be called a massive democracy desert. The environmental groups, with few exceptions, have jumped ship on this. The Democratic Party, which should know better, has jumped ship on this, including some progressives like AOC [Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, representative of New York's 14th Congressional District]. And the press has never encountered a subject where they have been so uncritical for decades.

Consequently, we don't have much protection other than arousing feedback from programs like this where people can say to their senators and representatives, who are back home now in the August recess, "Why aren't you having hearings about this? Why are you making us pay for it as taxpayers and ratepayers instead of the investors in these electric utilities or these manufacturers that are pushing for nuclear reactors and nuclear fusion development?". Wind power and solar power win hands down in any kind of comparative analysis, whether it's carbon release, safety, competitiveness, timetable, or security.

M.V. Ramana: Exactly.

Ralph Nader: They're far more competitive, produce far less carbon, protect the environment far more in terms of lack of radioactive waste and other things. And they're not susceptible to sabotage or to warfare. Look at the Ukrainian giant plant that is constantly in the news about whether it's going to get hit by a Russian or Ukrainian missile...

M.V. Ramana: Zaporizhzhia.

Ralph Nader: ...and how terrified the International Atomic Energy Unit in Vienna are about this prospect. Well, you don't hear that about a solar energy farm. You don't hear that about a wind turbine system. So we just have to get our rebuttals back in very compressed form. But I don't buy that the environmental groups don't know what we're talking about. They know fully what we're talking about. They're just making compromises. The members of Congress basically are saying again and again on energy bills, if you want solar and wind, you have to give a seat at the table for nuclear. Massachusetts Senator Ed Markey has told me this—that's the compromise that keeps nuclear from being sent into the dust bins of history. ~~22 min 25 sec~~

M.V. Ramana: I agree, absolutely. There is this compromise that's happening, but also the nuclear industry has an enormous amount of capacity for both putting out propaganda and for lobbying with Congress. And that's, I think, one of the things. And there are some environmental groups that I know where their funding has been tied—their funders have basically said, "We need to have nuclear power on the table. We don't want you to make arguments about it either directly or indirectly."

Ralph Nader: Hannah?

Hannah Feldman: Thank you. Pretty much every time a new sector gets charismatic CEOs trying to sell us a disruptive solution, some of them are outed as grifters. Cryptocurrency had Sam Bankman-Fried. Health tech had Elizabeth Holmes. Pharmaceuticals had Martin Shkreli. Are there any nuclear grifters we should keep an eye on, alleged, yet to be caught, potential nuclear grifters?

M.V. Ramana: That's a great question. I don't want to call them grifters. I think many of them might well be—they may not be trying to deceive. To put it another way, they are more self-deceptive. We have seen examples of companies that have made claims about what their reactor can do, which they've had to retract. An example of that is a company called Transatomic that was trying to produce a molten salt reactor. It was very highly publicized between around 2012 to 2017, and they were basically making claims about how they could work off nuclear waste, and that it would be completely safe, et cetera. This was started by a couple of graduate students at MIT. And then another professor at MIT who was not involved in that company looked at some result and said, "This doesn't sound right," and asked DEECS (Digital Electronic Engine Control System) students to run a test of a calculation and found that it actually doesn't work. And so [Transatomic](#) had to retract.

That's the only public example that I can think of off the top of my head. But what actually they are shown time and again as lying—and this is something which you can easily show through empirical example, is claims about how costly these are going to be to build—how cheap, rather, is what they would say, and how long it would take. For example, the Westinghouse company used to have on its website, a little computer simulation that talked about their new AP1000 reactor as being made of modules manufactured in the factory. And the computer simulation would show tick, tick, tick, tick, tick—36 steps and each step there would be some other part that will come together like a Lego set. At the end of 36 steps, which is 36 months, the reactor is essentially ready. That's what they would say. But in actual fact, the reactors took about three times as long to build in Georgia. And again, the costs I mentioned—they were initially talking about these things costing about \$5 billion, but in fact those costs have ballooned to about \$35 billion. So are these people grifters? When people today say they are going to be able to make new reactors that are going to be cheap, under \$1 billion, or whatever it is, and then you find that actually it's going to cost much more. Would you call them grifters or do you just call them naïve people who just don't seem to understand how these things work? Their real motivation is the one thing that I don't want to speculate on. But I think the public and policymakers should treat any sort of these claims with a huge amount of distrust or skepticism and really put it to the test.

We started this discussion by talking about small modular reactors. There's a company called NuScale that is arguably the closest to being able to deploy one of these. NuScale initially talked about its reactors costing \$3 billion for 600 megawatts. That \$3 billion then turned into \$4.2 billion, and then that jumped to about \$6.1 billion. By this time, the reactor size they were talking about, had increased to about 720 megawatts,. Then that was seen to be too high, so then they said, we are going to make a slightly smaller one, and that's going to be \$5.3 billion for 460 megawatts. Then last year, that number jumped up to \$9.3 billion. So you'll see this pattern even before these reactors start construction. And at this point, NuScale's cost per unit of capacity is higher than the Vogtle reactor, which is already so expensive. I think the claims that these are going to be economical and cheap can be completely discounted, but that's the argument that they make all the time. It's slightly different from Elizabeth Holmes or some who say they can take a small pinprick of blood and then do a test on that, where you can technically show it's not going to work.

Ralph Nader: Well, we're out of time, unfortunately. We've been speaking with M.V. Ramana, who is the Simons Chair in Disarmament, Global and Human Security as well as a professor at the School of Public Policy and Global Affairs at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, Canada. Thank you very much, Professor Ramana, for spending this informed amount of time on this subject.

M.V. Ramana: Thank you so much. It's really been a great pleasure. And I think the questions that you guys asked were just amazing. You clearly understand what's happening, unlike many of the other interviewers who talked to me about, "Oh, don't we need nuclear power and this and that," so I don't have to do a lot of explaining about why it is. So it's been a great pleasure and an honor to be on your show.

Steve Skrovan: We've been speaking with Professor M.V. Ramana. We will link to his work at ralphnaderradiohour.com. Next, we'll talk some common sense with a grassroots organizer who has a plan that will serve the common good. 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, August 18, 2023. I'm Russell Mokhiber.

Nestlé USA has initiated a recall of some NESTLÉ TOLL HOUSE Chocolate Chip Cookie Dough known as "break and bake" bars after consumer complaints of wood fragments in the product. The recall is for two batches of the 16.5 ounce break and bake cookie dough products that were produced on April 24th and 25th, 2023. That's according to a report from *Food Safety News*. The implicated product was distributed to retail stores in the United States. The company said in its recall notice that "While no illnesses or injuries have been reported, we are taking this action out of an abundance of caution after a small number of consumers contacted Nestlé about this issue."

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, back with David Feldman and Hannah and the rest of the team. And just as a reminder, this interview was recorded before the devastating wildfires in Maui. David?

David Feldman: Paul Deslauriers is a grassroots organizer, who has coordinated nearly 300 grassroots groups focused on government system change. He has written a number of guidebooks on organizing, including *Seven Steps to Reclaim Democracy: An Empowering Guide For Systemic Change*, *Reclaim Paradise: RESET for the Common Good*, and *Common Sense: How we are Reclaiming Democracy and Resetting for the Common Good*. Welcome back to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*, Paul Deslauriers.

Paul Deslauriers: Thank you, David. It's wonderful to be here and an honor to be interviewed by Ralph. So thank you very much.

Ralph Nader: Welcome back, Paul. This is a continuation of past interviews we've had with you and I think our listeners are going to take heart from what you and your fellow citizens have done in Maui. But I want to give them a little background with a few quick questions about Maui, which I have visited and consider one of the most beautiful places on the planet Earth, along with Yosemite National Park. How large is Maui as one of the islands of the Hawaiian island archipelago? How many people live there and what is the nature of the economy?

Paul Deslauriers: Sure. Maui County, which I wrote about in *Common Sense* and the other books, is actually three inhabited islands—Molokai, Lāna'i and Maui itself. And there's also an uninhabited island called Kaho'olawe. We have about 186,000 residents here on the island and out of that we have about 103,000 who are registered voters. The main economy is tourism. About 80% of our income comes from tourism itself, so it's our mainstay. Our real estate has really shot up in terms of price and the value of the properties. As a result, we have then property taxes. And we are one of the more wealthy counties throughout the United States in terms of population because of this economic base, of having this tax base.

Ralph Nader: For over 100 years, Maui's been controlled by a few giant planters, as they're called, because it was an agricultural economy. And they really threw their weight around. They made it difficult for people to have a living wage. They opposed any kind of unions. They even interfered with internal migration in the island itself. And you came from the States. You were in California, you were a corporate consultant and when you came to live there you saw a huge possibility. The possibility, and listeners take heed here, the possibilities were to take control democratically of the governing body of Maui. Let's just quickly describe what is this governing body which is elected by the voters.

Paul Deslauriers: Sure. Well, it is a fascinating story. As you mentioned, Ralph, 1893, the island was taken over by plantation owners. As a result, for about 130 years, the whole county and many of the Hawaiian islands were controlled, what they call, by the Big Five. These were five large corporations. And they really did suppress the citizens in terms of their engagement and participation. They made it illegal even to have conversations with other union members about strikes or anything along that line. This corporatocracy that took over I think is what we're moving into also right now on a global level.

So it was a good petri dish in terms of okay, here's the situation where we have these corporations controlling all aspects of our governance and economy, so how can we get that back? And the question then went right to our governance. And if you look at then the system that we have here, a governance, we have nine county council members. They're all elected all at one time. Even though the county council members represent districts, when they vote, everyone votes for all nine. So it makes it especially challenging is that you need quite a bit of money in order to really campaign through all the three islands. So when we started this, we saw it was an opportunity to create what we call an umbrella process to really start to work with all of the county's districts at the same time and really support the candidates that truly support the people and the environment.

Ralph Nader: And this started in 2018, correct?

Paul Deslauriers: Correct. So that was the first time we started what we call the Maui Pono Network, and that was our local political action committee. And this is so crucial, I think, for the listeners to understand that this is a story of hope and of really changing the system at the root level so that we can regain our governance to truly support the people instead of corporations. And this is a way in when we start to go through municipalities, through local government, through city, town and county governance and we start to look at then the majority of those legislators. It's the county council; in some counties, they call it boards. But again, that majority which varies because some counties only have three county council members, so that means you got to get two. Here for us, we had to get five.

In 2018, we were successful with the Maui Pono Network and we certainly collaborated with a lot of progressives here on the islands and we got that majority for the first time on the island since the overthrow in 1893. So it was quite a shift that occurred. And as a result, laws started to change. We started to change the tax incentives and tax base. We started to make it so that it really did support the people and the local environment. And so they came back the following election cycle with a vengeance in 2020, and they outspent us 43 times. Despite that though, we were able to get six out of the seven charter amendments on there and also get now six out of the nine elected in the county council.

Ralph Nader: In other words, you beat them. You beat them and you achieved a larger majority on the county governance system in Maui. And people are saying, "Wow, what actually did you achieve?" Because the governance of Maui was as democratic as you could make it humanly and the corporations and the tourist industry was allied to block you, but again and again you beat them in the last two, three years. And this is so important for Congress, because I keep saying and we keep talking on this program about if people recover Congress, a lot of things get turned around in terms of the corporatization of our country and the military-industrial complex. That's why this is so important, listeners, to focus on Maui. It had very powerful corporations controlling that island like a plantation and it's turned around. So let's go through one area of reform after another briefly, Paul.

Paul Deslauriers: In this four-year period, we had 19 charter amendments that the voters brought in. And basically the charter is our local constitution. It is our framework of how we govern ourselves. It's how the power is wired throughout the entire system; it's how the revenues are distributed, and the process of how we do that. It sets the process of law for the entire region, and

so the county council has a lot of control in terms of that process. And also, except once every 10 years, we have a group of 11 citizens [the Charter Commission] who are selected to change the charter.

But let's start with 2018. Again, we got that majority, and we started making some significant changes. And in 2020, one of the charter amendments that was passed is that instead of the mayor, who usually was controlled by big money interests, he would control who was selected onto the charter commission. Usually it had been done behind closed doors, without citizens' participation in the actual selection process. And it was always the good old boy network that got chosen up to this point in time. But in the previous election, in 2020, they said, "Okay, it's going to change." Now each of the county council members will be able to select someone as well as two selections by the mayor. So that gave us the 11 that we needed for the commission. And basically we had about 130,000 citizens that were eligible for this, and I was one of the 11 selected. So I had a chance to roll up my sleeves and really get in there and work with our charter, which again is our constitution, and it sets the groundwork, the framework for how we operate and run things.

Ralph Nader: Our listeners may say, "Well, did the corporations go to Honolulu and the state capitol to try to overturn or undermine your county government democratic revolution?" And then we'll get to how life is better in Maui because of what you've all done since 2018. Did they try to sandbag you in Honolulu?

Paul Deslauriers: No, they can't because again, even though we're not home rule county, the state has a lot of clout in certain areas. For example, they oversee the whole issue of education, for example, and other things that we have no control over on a county level. So when we did any changes that had to do with our local constitution, we made sure that it wasn't overridden by the state constitution, so there wasn't interference in that respect. The 19 charter amendments that were passed though, were game-changers. And let me just go through a few of them, Ralph, as you requested before.

Ralph Nader: Surge, go ahead.

Paul Deslauriers: One of them was about our water situation. Since early plantation time, all the way back to 1850s, the water was controlled by these plantations and they created diversions so that they would control where the water goes, how it goes. That system was still controlled by these corporations even up to just recently. But what happened with this last charter amendment that we passed in 2022 was that we said, "No more." Because what happened was our water systems were sold to a Canadian pension fund that is outrageously known to get as much money as they can for their investors while the communities really suffer. We wanted to stop this from happening, and they were looking at a 50-year lease for control of most of our water system throughout the islands. But because of what we did, this charter amendment now allows that control to go to a citizens group that is controlled by us here in Maui, including the oversee of all the distribution systems and the water itself.

Water is the lifeblood for this island. It is where crops are determined, where development is determined, so who controls the water controls our future. And that future got back to the citizens itself. So there's one issue with the water.

Ralph Nader: Okay. Let's go to the next one.

Paul Deslauriers: Another one is affordable housing. We had issues here where the average house sale right now is \$1.2 million. So citizens here don't have that type of income; no one could afford housing. As a result, what had been going on is that a lot of people from the mainland or other places were purchasing up these properties and basically displacing our citizens. What we did resulted in us now having our own housing department that's focused on affordable housing. Now they can purchase land and then develop the infrastructure so that we can really have true affordable housing. And some of that, hopefully, will be affordable in perpetuity with the system that we're creating through that new department.

Another one is around our governance. I think that one of the main avenues of cronyism and nepotism in our system was the way that the mayor would control the 33 boards and commissions. He would make decisions as to who would be on those boards and commissions. This is really significant in terms of the impact it has; it's like our third branch of governance here in the county. And basically they said, okay, we are not allowing to have this type of framework that is so important. Instead, now we have a group of nine citizens who do this whole process of looking at who will be on the boards and commissions and then make recommendations to the county council and the mayor for decisions on who will represent them. So, again, police commission, we have a lot of other different ones that are so important to us. Planning commission and all these now are going to be determined by the citizens and then finalized by the other legislators.

Ralph Nader: Yeah. And these boards and commissions affect the daily lives of people in Maui in very pronounced manner. Tell us what you did for workers, labor.

Paul Deslauriers: For labor, we're dealing with resolutions now. They passed, aside from the 19 charter amendments; looking at raising the minimum wage, is one aspect of that. But all the other things in terms of transportation, are other things that had to do with different ordinances and resolutions that were passed. As far as the actual charter amendments, there were a lot of things that we've done, for example protecting the reefs. And we're looking at the whole thing of injection wells and the impact that has on our environment. So a lot of things now are being brought to the forefront that had been suppressed and buried, and the environmental impact just kept on swelling and growing, so we can't ignore these things any longer. But now that we have the people who, in our governance, can really support this and support changes, it makes for a much brighter future for us here.

Ralph Nader: How are you dealing with the tourist industry, and any tax changes that are fairer at the local level that you've gotten through?

Paul Deslauriers: Yes. There are tax changes made, especially to the hotels and timeshare condominiums that bring in a lot of our tourists. That's where the tax base was increased that made it more commensurate with what's happening on Oahu and some of the other islands in terms of what they're being charged now. Before they were one of the lowest in the nation in terms of actual taxation for these mega resorts here.

Ralph Nader: Well, listeners, you can read how Paul and his colleagues pulled this off in a brand new book by Paul Deslauriers. It's called *Common Sense: How we are Reclaiming Democracy and Resetting for the Common Good*, “getting off the subjugation road into the common good road”, to use one of Paul's metaphors.

I'm sure our listeners are saying, how in the world did you pull this off? How large was the core group of active citizens? How did you keep them unified and not squabbling, with their eye on the prize, as they say in the civil rights movement? Can you give us a sense of how this occurred?

Paul Deslauriers: Well, I guess I have an advantage of 43 years' experience in doing organizational development work. Before I used to work for corporations and then I started being a fulltime activist. So I had experience in terms of how to create it so that you have solid teams where you minimize any type of divisiveness or manipulation, especially when you have outside saboteurs that come in. And we've had to deal with that. We've had to deal with that in a lot of different areas when we start to deal with activism like this. Because if big money interests see that you're successful, they will often hire people to go in there and try to bust up groups. This is part of the reality. One important aspect is to have a very strong foundational group at the core that collectively, collaboratively owns the organization, that makes it almost impenetrable by manipulative disruptive forces.

I think another one is that you have team players that really work with communication skills. So we've all done training on listening and giving positive and constructive feedback. We also have clarity of vision, that is very important in creating a level of cohesiveness within a group. Our vision is very clear as we move forward and we're all on board with that. We also have different types of expertise that we've developed over the years. Many of our core members started in 2018 with us. We have someone who didn't have much experience with video or editing who now is our local expert, because he worked on developing these skills.

So when you have a core team that's truly dedicated and wants to bring about systemic change and you have the foundation that you need, then you can develop and grow this without having what I see as a lot of divisiveness. All of our groups, by the way, Maui Pono Network is all volunteer work; we have no paid staff there at all. All the monies that we receive go directly towards that. When you have volunteers, you have to have the right motivation, the right structure, the right training so that you can work cohesively and collaboratively together. That's crucial for anyone who wants to start a similar group.

We're starting groups right now. In 2021, we started one on the big island, called Huli. And now we're working with the Kauai and also Oahu, helping them with their political action committees. As we mentioned, the state has a lot of clout in terms of what happens to all the counties, so it's imperative that we start to affect the legislatures there on the state level. That's why we're networking all of the four counties so that we can work collaboratively to elect legislators at the state level who can change the laws like we've done here in Maui County. It's really quite amazing when you look at the 19 charter amendments and the huge impact they've had on our community already.

Ralph Nader: And you can read all about it in the brand new book, *Common Sense: How we are Reclaiming Democracy and Resetting for the Common Good* that Paul has written. It's very specific about exactly how the campaigns took one step after another. There are even pictures and graphs. You can't have a better handbook because it's not just prophetic, it's not just advisory, they've done it. They control overwhelmingly the county government in Maui. It isn't even close. Tell our listeners how they can get this book because it's not going to be in Barnes & Noble bookstores anytime soon. They can get it direct, can't they?

Paul Deslauriers: They can get it directly from our website, at reclaimdemocracyproject.org. And if people are interested in looking at developing something similar within their own counties, within their own cities or towns, to work with changing the legislation so that it supports the people and the local environment, we are doing trainings. We have workshops that we're starting to put on right now in different counties. When you have the proper foundation and you can move forward with that, you can make some huge shifts and changes within your local governance in a very short time period. And it does work from our example.

Ralph Nader: Give the website again slowly, Paul.

Paul Deslauriers: Yeah. reclaimdemocracyproject.org.

Ralph Nader: That's how you can get Paul Deslauriers' new book, *Common Sense: How we are Reclaiming Democracy and Resetting for the Common Good*.

Paul Deslauriers: It's also available on Amazon, by the way, Ralph.

Ralph Nader: Okay. Well, I'd prefer they get it directly from you, but if they –

Paul Deslauriers: Me, too. I'm with you.

Ralph Nader: – have an account, we'll take it anyway. It's a very exciting development and it's just amazing that it's not headline news around the country, not to mention the world. But you listen to BBC on public radio, you listen to CBS, NBC, it's all about violence, death, destruction, war, massacres, natural disasters. Although they do have to cover that, they leave people very discouraged and demoralized. And so, listeners, I want you to call your local radio and TV stations, get a hold of your newspapers and tell them to check in on this website, reclaimdemocracyproject.org, and have Paul and his collaborators be interviewed. So let's get going, listeners, on this. This is good news.

Paul Deslauriers: You're right, Ralph. I just want to mention the whole thing about the good news. Right now we are bombarded with information about how this external mechanism of global governance is affecting this whole society here in the United States, but globally also. And it's usually a very sad story of doom and gloom. And what we're doing with this is, "Wait a minute, no, there's an uplifting shift that can happen." When you get involved with other people and work together like this, it truly is something that uplifts your spirit. It gets you engaged and involved in a way with community that you see has potential to affect generations in the future. It's a way out of this mess that we're in right now.

Ralph Nader: I know that some of our listeners are saying, "You got limited authority in Maui county government, but are you doing anything about climate disruption?" How are you dealing with the economic activity, respecting the environment?

Paul Deslauriers: Well, we have several committees here in Maui, and what we're looking at doing things on a state level once we get more legislators there. That's the challenge we have right now and why we're organizing all four counties here in Hawaii so that we can affect that as we start to get then state legislation. Once we start to get that majority on a state level, the beauty is we can invoke nullification, and that's for constitutional overreach, and we can start to utilize the 10th Amendment. We're limited here because, on a county level, we don't have home rule. Some counties they do, but here in Hawaii, it's the state, so we have to work to get that majority of legislators on a state level.

Ralph Nader: Speaking of that, what are the two senators and the representative from Hawaii reacting to, what you've done in Maui, in Congress?

Paul Deslauriers: Well, there's been a level of silence and a lack of wanting to even acknowledge that there's a way to get our true democracy back. What really rules here on the state level is you say Democrats, but actually they're corporate Democrats, which is a big difference. Because the loyalties of corporate Democrats are for big money interests, not for the people and the environment. So until we can change that, we're kind of stuck on a state level. But what people can do is, as they organize within the different counties and get other counties within the state, you can change state legislators. And once that happens, then you can do things like invoke the 10th Amendment and stop this constitutional overreach that's happening.

Ralph Nader: I have a suggestion to test your two senators and representative. Send them an article on what's going on in Maui and the progress you've made and ask them to put it in the *Congressional Record* like they do for birthday announcements and awards at rotary clubs, et cetera. See if they put it in the *Congressional Record*. Unfortunately, Paul, we're out of time. We've been talking with the citizen advocate extraordinaire Paul Deslauriers, author of the new book, *Common Sense: How we are Reclaiming Democracy and Resetting for the Common Good* in Maui County in the state of Hawaii. And once more, give the listeners your website, how they can get the book.

Paul Deslauriers: Right. It's reclaimdemocracyproject.org. So reclaimdemocracyproject.org is all one word, .org. You can also get it on Amazon, but, as Ralph mentioned, we definitely prefer that you order the book directly from us so that you can also get a newsletter stay informed about the different changes as we start to work with other counties.

Ralph Nader: On that same website?

Paul Deslauriers: On the same website, yes.

Ralph Nader: reclaimdemocracyproject.org. Thank you very much, Paul. To be continued. And we're going to try to get you more media stateside here. It's been too long coming.

Paul Deslauriers: Well, I would greatly appreciate that, Ralph. We need to spread the word. This is good news that we can send out as opposed to some of the terrible things that have been happening around the world.

Ralph Nader: For sure.

Paul Deslauriers: Thank you, Ralph.

Steve Skrovan: I want to thank our guests again, Professor M.V. Ramana and Paul Deslauriers. For those of you listening on the radio, that's our show. For you podcast listeners, stay tuned for some bonus material we call "The Wrap Up", featuring Francesco DeSantis. And "In Case You Haven't Heard." Our theme music "Stand Up, Rise Up" was written and performed by Kemp Harris. Our proofreader is Elisabeth Solomon. Our associate producer is Hannah Feldman. Our Gofer Emeritus is John Richard. Our social media manager is Steven Wendt.

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

Ralph Nader: Thank you, everybody.