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Ralph Nader

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“Two Addresses to the Faculty and Students on the Organizing of College Students in Order to Bring About Change”

Ralph Nader

Portland State University

November 16, 1970

PSU Library Special Collections and University Archives

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RUSTY BLAKE: The local organization of OSPIRG would like to thank the members of the faculty and the administration for attending this morning. We'd like for you to give a good morning to public advocate, Mr. Ralph Nader. [applause]

RALPH NADER: Thank you Rusty, ladies and gentlemen. I'd like to spend a short amount of time describing what this new organization could do, called the Oregon Student Public Interest Research Group, in the context of the problems of our times. Far more important than its preliminary impact, once it becomes established, is the idea it espouses in concrete form, that a power in any society is only going to be accountable in proportion to the amount of initiatory democratic power focused on institutions by citizens. We've talked a lot in our political science literature and civics courses about representative institutions and democratic participation. But I don't think we've become concrete enough in terms of the initiatory power that is required. And I'd like to explain that in some detail.

Most of us know what the structural problems are in this country. In terms of their surfacing, they focus around rotting or crumbling cities and minority group problems and pollution; the lack of bureaucracies, whether public or private, to be efficient and responsive; a tremendously sophisticated tax system, which transfers public money into corporate or other special interest privileges through breaks and loopholes and allowances and the like. A governmental

performance, purportedly to help people like urban renewal, and Medicare, and subsidies to poor farmers being transmuted over the years relentlessly into support or profit-making opportunities for landowners into cities, for large agribusiness corporations who don't need public subsidies, or for physicians or other recipients of a new type of welfare system, which we might call the "corporate welfare system." We see side-by-side with tremendous affluence and a great production machine with science and technological capabilities, next to the most serious and yawning problems that a society of our state of development could possibly conceive of: a country that produces untold agricultural wealth does two things for its food. One, it doesn't distribute some of the surplus to hungry people, which are about 30 million Americans in the country, as it should, and two, it processes it in such a way where many of the basic nutrients are taken out and people's food habits and tastes begin to ring more and more around soft drinks and the Frito-Lay syndrome and the kinds of non-nutritious, easily gratifying food products.

This is an example not of the lack of capability, it's an example of not deploying the power to distribute this capability along the lines of the citizens' well-being and the public welfare. Everywhere, the pressures on citizens are increasing. They're increasing in such new ways that it takes about a decade or a generation for us to respond. For example, as a nation, and as a legal system, ideally, we abhor violence. And yet we have allowed in the last 25 years, an enormous production of environmental violence, from gases to chemicals to particulate matter, which is not just despoiling or destroying natural resources, not just putting fishermen out of work and ruining natural resources for recreational use, but affecting the very prerequisites of human health and survival, generating higher and higher levels of emphysema, respiratory, other respiratory ailments, cancers, heart disease, and the like, affecting the health of future generations by virtue of the genetic impact of these chemicals and gases. As a result, we have witnessed this tremendous explosion of environmental violence just in property damage alone. Air pollution destroys more property in one month than all the crime in the street put together in one year. And as a result, it has taken us such a long time to first describe environmental pollution as forms of violence to property and human beings. And second to develop the legal structures that really mean what they say, and penalize or stop this contamination. And third, to develop the citizen initiatory or support structures that keep an eye on government to make sure it does its job as the laws verbally require it to do.

Well, there are a lot of simple analogies to this imbalance between special interest power and citizenship power. But perhaps the most graphic one can be taken from the football field. Suppose a score came down to you: 200 to nothing. One college defeated another 200 to nothing. The first approach, the first response would be "Was there another team on the field?" If there was another team on the field, we could all really despair about the prospects

for the future of that team. If there *were* no players on the field, that's actually a more optimistic sign. Because that, in effect, leaves open the potential for realigning, realigning the power and getting things in a countervailing way toward a more reduced disparity, if not a turnaround of the situation.

Now in Washington, there are 10,000 lawyers representing special interest groups; trade associations, companies, and the like. Trying to claim things before government or manipulate government regulators or the like. There are two dozen lawyers full-time in Washington representing the public or consumer interest. Now that is a fairly sizable amount compared to what obtains at the state capital level, where there is fortunate... there's one or two or three lawyers working the other side of the aisle. And yet, of course, you see, we don't get any justice from governmental systems if citizenship power does not represent itself, and make itself felt. It does once in a while at election time in a minor or modified sort of way. But what we need are full time professional advocates, lawyers, physicians, ecologists, economists, accountants, technicians of all kinds, working every day as public citizens: that's their career. Right now, most engineers work for industry, and try to develop excuses as to why industry can't clean up the environment. Very few engineers are working on the other side of the aisle saying "Nonsense. We not only have the technology, we also have the technology that would be inexpensive to install, given the alternative horrendous costs of a continuing contaminating situation."

Lawyers, by and large, now defend polluters, they defend monopolists, they defend those who'd corrupt a governmental system, bribing officials, or other more subtle forms of corruption. Where are the lawyers to defend and to promote the other side? And no matter what ideal we try to impose on a future scenario, what ideology, what answers, it's all going to proceed from how many people with various skills wake up every morning and in effect, engage full-time citizenship careers. This is a very demanding task: building democratic power and making it endure is so difficult a task that most societies haven't even made an essay at it. But it's quite clear, certainly in recent years, those young lawyers or those people who did make the effort, overcame, in their own way, overwhelming odds.

Two law students in Texas just displayed that a few weeks ago; they made a study of illegal property tax assessments, showing that timber interests and oil and gas interests and other owners of large Houston buildings, commercial and industrial, were underpaying their property taxes by at least 50%. Which meant of course, not only did school districts and other municipal services suffer, but small property owners have had to pay more to make up the difference. At the same time, a constitutional amendment was being proposed, one of five, to exempt timberlands and farmlands from the fair market value treatment in the property tax assessment situation. In other words, to make it easy for them to pay less taxes. All the other

constitutional amendments failed—passed, rather—this one failed, primarily because of the disclosures of the students' studies throughout the state. How much effort? A few hundred hours, two law students going right to the core of the data and showing basically, that those alleged upright citizens of the corporate community, were robbing their community. They were engaged in illegal complicity or activity and not paying their property taxes.

All around the country this is happening. The question is not “Will it work?” The question is, “What's the velocity?” What's the prevalence? How big must it become so the citizens have a greater voice, and a greater participation and a greater ability to oust institutions or officials that are performing in such outrageous manners. There are all kinds of laws in this country to protect citizens that are flagrantly violated: food and drug laws, motor vehicle safety laws, flammable fabric laws, housing codes, health codes, hospital safety codes, building codes. In fact, the most fundamental laws are violated.

In New York City, for example, there has been a situation of widespread standing and tenure, whereby banks and finance companies and other institutions who sued debtors—who default, say—they don't even let the debtor know he's being sued. There's a process called “suer service” where the process servers take the papers and throw them away or rip them up, and so when the court date comes up, what happens? The plaintiff—bank—is there, represented, but the defendant debtor isn't there; the judge says default judgment; the car's repossessed; deficiency judgment, his wages are garnished. Hundreds of thousands of such cases. If you want to know a more fundamental procedural corruption of the courts, it is to have someone sued without letting him know he's sued so he can defend himself.

The process then of initiatory, democratic action can be schematized in the following way: we have rights in this country; we need more; we have a considerable number of rights, all of us. They don't mean anything, unless they are linked with remedies, effective remedies, and legal representation. You can have all the rights you want against your auto manufacturer in your warranty. If he disregards that warranty, you've got one alternative, and what lawyer is interested in a \$300-400 lemon case? Indeed, most people's complaints and grievances—from your own experience—whether it's with an insurance policy, a finance company, a bank, an auto manufacturer, a supermarket: they add up to billions of dollars of consumer fraud a year. But individually, they're not big enough in dollar terms to interest the lawyer to get into the courts with all their delaying expense, which means that most Americans are shut out of the legal system. And that's a contrived kind of anarchy, which strips citizens of their initiatory power to get things moving. Representative power will never be representative, unless hovering in and around and over it are citizens equipped with the tools and the representation to blow the whistle.

And that's what this OSPIRG is trying to begin, basically recognizing the following: students represent a widespread interest group in this society. In effect they are about as correlative with the category "citizens" as you can get. They, up to now, have been used largely in two ways. They have been treated like children. And there's no better way to get a childlike performance than to treat someone like a child, particularly after he's 18, 19, 20, 23, 28, 30. Some of them have been through wars. And they're still treated under the pernicious doctrine of *in locis parentis*, in other words, that the school is in the place of the parent. Or secondly, and this is a more recent phenomenon, students are becoming a national scapegoat. And not just by some lowly politicians in quest for a few cheap votes. Our highest so-called corporate or governmental statesmen are engaging in this. After all, you might have heard the Vice President and other governors talk about how most of our problems are due to hippies, yuppies, malcontents and discontents. Well, as I look over the scene on the front pages of our newspapers and see the problems and list them that are affecting this country, from inflation, to Vietnam, to racial problems, to crumbling housing situation, to pollution, to massive price fixing and consumer fraud and corruption. How many of these really are attributed in whole or part to yuppies, hippies, malcontents and discontents? How many hippies and yuppies do you know would it take to smog Gary, Indiana, to destroy Lake Erie, to wipe out the Mississippi River? [applause]

Any politician, no matter what his ideology, will always engage in two things by and large, unless he's honest. [laughter] One is to find the scapegoat. Now there's a difference between finding a responsible... finding someone who's responsible for an ill or for an abuse and finding a scapegoat. The difference is that in the former case, you allocate the accountability and the responsibility for the abuse in direct proportion to the contribution to that abuse and the ability by the corporation or union or agency to avoid or prevent that abuse. On the other hand, those that have very little to do with the abuses, those that are visible, however, because they've got beards and sandals and the like, those are given responsibility for our ailments and ills. That's what you call a scapegoat. But a second technique of the modern political demagogue is to answer the question, "What do you think of Americans in paroxysms of praise?" Oh, how they love to praise people so they can further delude them and manipulate them. The fact is, however, that whatever brought us to this state of affairs in one crisis after another in this country—none of which we should be involved in, given our talent and our capability—whatever brought us here, the only thing that's going to take us out is citizen action and involvement on a concrete case-by-case, geographic area by geographic area basis. And as long as politicians stand up, and preen and praise people as if nothing's wrong; as long as millions of Americans spend billions of hours playing bridge and watching Johnny Carson and the soap operas and chatting endlessly over the telephone, instead of engaging in what is an

obligation—not a luxury, not an avocation, an obligation of citizenship action—so long as this is going to occur, there is no two ways about it.

And that's why in many ways, the concept of citizenship which is almost dull to the ear, it's kind of like what you read about in very dull civics books. The concept of citizenship has got to be subjected to daily professional advancement, strategies, tactics, empirical analyses, developing of value systems to bridge new kinds of a factual situation. For example, take the flag. We have a value system that says it's unpatriotic to tear the flag down. Why then isn't it unpatriotic to destroy or poison lakes, rivers, streams, land, air, that make up the United States of America? It's just a lag in the application of values toward empirical realities that have been camouflaged from this kind of value analysis. And in many ways, this kind of approach with the establishment of OSPIRG will begin carving out that new dimension of full-time careerism in the professional citizenship area. It's not just the 10 or 15 or 20 people full-time that are forging these public policies and building this democratic power base. It's also what their effect will be on students, the radiating effect. There's no reason for example, why courses, seminars, papers, student extracurricular activities begin in this process of investigation, analysis, strategy development, implementation. So the students, with a tremendous reservoir of potential energy, have something linked up that is a full-time professional arm so that this tremendous energy isn't dissipated by vacations, exams, other interruptions that make student concerns so cyclical and so depreciable. Now, this is a type of a thing which unfortunately we would have liked the established generation to provide. But the established generation has never understood that the more complex the society gets, the greater proportion of doctors and engineers and economists and technicians who have to wake up in the morning and say, not "Where am I going to go to work for a private organization, but how am I going to work on a project organization, *on* a governmental organization to reshape, change, clean up or displace these institutions with more humane groupings?"

We've got to look on citizenship as an endless frontier for strategic development, for action programs. What now we might think is an impossible task to clean up a pollution situation, five or ten years we should have the kind of program which we can begin putting into effect step by step by step. It's interesting, is it not, that given the level of problems in this country, the level of sacrifice requested is trivial by comparison with prior years. This kind of operation which we'll get underway will take \$3 per student to support. That's beer money on Saturday night. And of course, the average student will probably spend \$200 to \$250 on tobacco, liquor and soft drinks. And it's just got to be looked at in that concrete way. I have never had a soft drink in the last 15 years. Why? Because it's sinful to have a soft drink in the last 15 years, as long as you can put this effort in this kind of impact. Now that's a big sacrifice, isn't it, to give up your soft drinks and your Pall Malls and your record albums? Well, look at the level of sacrifice in the

past, during history, and you'll see what I mean, you'll see the impact. People used to lose their jobs, put in jail, the rack and the screw, the chain, exiled from companies, pushed into the mountains, into the desert. And now what we're asking and what the student leaders that have been working night and day in Oregon to do, is just try it out. Give that much and try it out. To see what kind of impact it will have—not just what this action arm will do for you, but how you will begin supplementing and building your own concept of citizenship, careerism, and engagement. Because unless this country develops 400,000-500,000 positions, and these full-time citizenship areas working outside of institutions on them in the next decade, we're really going to be in even more serious trouble. The bells are tolling and the problems are being deferred year after year until they become more intense and more crisis-ridden. And that's what's got to happen.

Now, one thing in conclusion: students are not that different in terms of their approach than the older generation. There is still, based on years of miseducation, a feeling that you can't fight city hall, can't fight GM. You can't fight any large institution whether outside or inside, which is of course utter nonsense. If you take any advance in getting these institutions to be more humane, it's because some individual began blowing that whistle and he got adherence, and the greatest citizenship impact will occur not off the job, but on the job. Five years ago, an inspector in a Fisher body plant in General Motors in St. Louis saw hundreds of thousands of Chevys coming out with poor welding. He deduced quite accurately that this would expose passengers to carbon monoxide leakage and other combustion gases. He blew the whistle on the company after he was ignored going all the way up to the internal company hierarchy. He went to public authorities; two and a half years later, GM recalled two plus million Chevrolets to correct that kind of problem. Now, that was an act of citizenship right on the job; he didn't have to join some community group or anything, it was right on the job.

And I would hope that you would look at this organization for what it really is: the start perhaps of an entirely new and possibly historic trend in the student arena throughout the country, where hundreds of these public action arms are developed, in effect giving career roles to young people coming right out of these universities, and funded and controlled by the students to have maximum focus and impact related to their concerns for their society. And the state is ahead of any other state in this area. There are students organizing in California, Illinois, in Georgia and elsewhere. But the Oregon example, I think, will be used to literally electrify the country in this respect. Because unlike so many other student concerns—and students underestimate their impact on our society in the last few years, it's been tremendous, with the most primitive types of techniques, demonstrations and picketing and the like. It can be much, much more effective and enduring if it's recognized that there are going to be ups and downs

and separations to all these consumer can student concerns unless they hook up with their own professional action arms on a full-time basis. Thank you. [applause]

We can have some questions now if you'd like, or discuss some of the... more details. Yes sir.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: [inaudible, off microphone]

NADER: It would be probably your reaction. In other words, those who are aware of what's going on or who have read the investigations and disclosures demand fundamental change in the whole hierarchy of operation, from the nature of the legal impacts to the internal democracy of these large organizations. The internal freedoms, or lack thereof, the level of innovation to produce safety and the like. That's what basically will happen. Let me give you a simple example. For years, coal miners would go down to the mines and come up with black lung disease. One out of every two coal miners end up with this crippling lung disease. For years, they'd go to the doctors who were indentured to the coal industry, and the doctors would tell him, you've got asthma, or that's because you're smoking; they didn't recognize coal dust as a source of coal pneumoconiosis called black lung disease. Although Britain recognized it in the 30s and made it a compensable worker-related disease.

Along came three doctors who blew the whistle on their profession in West Virginia They went from one hollow in Appalachia to another, talking to miners telling them: you get this disease from the mines, from the coal dust. These corporations are making endless profits, a portion of which could save your life if they were applied to dust control apparatus. And all of a sudden—everything is the same, the same hazards, the same miners—they became aware, alert, and they even rejected their own corrupt union leadership, and marched on Charleston. And they got a tough bill through Congress. And they almost up-ended the union with a spectacular basic grassroots reform movement. It failed, but other tries are coming. The point is, it was done with virtually no resources and no support. The laws were against them, the federal government was indifferent, the coal mine union leaders were against them, the state government was in the hands of the coal industry, and they almost did it with the most modest of resources.

That's another point to keep in mind. The fact that ten people can't get something changed, doesn't mean that twenty can't get it changed. You've got to think in terms of quantitative input increments in power here. Otherwise, you will indulge in the vanities of idealistic dilettantes, namely despair, pessimism, discouragement, and the like. There's a critical mass of power that has to be built up. So in answer to your question, you'll get a level of awareness, a demand for change, and increasingly a personal commitment to that change.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: [inaudible]

RALPH NADER: Question is, is there a statewide headquarters for OSPIRG? Those of you who are interested in the details—and I would hope most are—your student leaders here, people who have been working hard to develop the thought, as well as the program for OSPIRG have got memos and detailed descriptions that should answer most of your questions. And those that aren't answered, you can ask them directly, Rusty Blake here is... pardon?

[AUDIENCE MEMBER responds]

NADER: And right outside the door, the materials are... Very simply, OSPIRG is student funded and student controlled. Representatives from every student campus that commits itself to it with a power of recall by students of the student representative, with public hearings held on campus to decide what the various priorities are. I might mention one thing. In the process of trying to develop a democracy which says there must be no victimization without representation. The big problem is that the victims start fighting among one another, the victims start squabbling, that's what's in effect ruined one reform or change movement after another. And it's important to recognize that of the 50 problems that OSPIRG could work with, it's not going to be able to work with all of them at its initial level of development. But it's important to recognize that every victory for one victim is a victory for all people. And it's important to realize that if a procedural victory or a substantive victory occurs, that new pathway can be used by a lot of other people. It's like a currency. It's fungible, it's transferable. And that's when I would urge some of you who may have other ideas or other priorities to recognize that this isn't *the* effort. This is one effort. And insofar as it moves in various directions, all these moves are available to all spectrum of disadvantaged people or people who think they're getting a raw deal.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: [inaudible]

RALPH NADER: Well of course... you mean like in the pollution area?

[AUDIENCE MEMBER responds]

NADER: Well, let's first of all talk about what it's costing the consumer now, as a base point. Consumer fraud is costing the consumer over \$200 billion a year, you can rest assured that 25% of every dollar you spent goes down the drain. I can elaborate that ad infinitum if we have time, but go and write to Senator Phillip Hart's office and get a statement where he broke this down. Price fixing for example, steals—it's a criminal act—steals \$45 billion from the American

consumer every year. Adulteration of food, deceptive packaging, usurious interest rates, on and on and on, 200 billion. The environmental destruction, never in the history of this country, have there been such massive property destroyers, and impairments to human health and safety then comes out of our plants and mines and exhaust pipes. Air pollution, as I mentioned, \$14 billion a year. The impact on land, on fertility of the land, on water is just enormous. We've hardly begun to quantify it in any precise terms, except just to be boggled by the dimension.

Now, look at it from the other side of the ledger: corporations. Last year, they spent less than 1% of their profits to install pollution prevention technology. This opens up an interesting distinction. You don't say that the corporation close up. If you don't, if you continue polluting, you say look corporation, as people you say to them, you say you keep operating, keep employing, keep paying your workers, keep refurbishing your machinery. But until you clean up the pollution, all your profits go to pollution prevention technology. And then you watch to see how fast they move. [laughter] So you see, you make a distinction between enough operations to keep the factory moving. But then the profits: a five to 10% allocation of profits would about absorb all that could physically be absorbed in any given year by way of pollution prevention technology. GM makes almost \$2 billion a year after taxes.

[tape skips and picks up as NADER responds to another topic]

What's to prevent this organization from being controlled by its leaders? First, the structure. You've got a recall structure in this program, as you do in some of the states, about four of the states. If we had a recall provision in the state of Connecticut where I grew up, we would have a lot better accountability on the part of our elected officials as well. The recall provision is one, the public hearings are another. The diffusion of student participation. It isn't one campus that controls it. Our representatives from all different campuses, which it makes it much more difficult to become cliquish, as well as the professional conscience of your employees. That is, your lawyers and your ecologists are just not going to be manipulated into cliquish, petty type channels. And finally, the safeguard that is relied upon for any organization, you've just got to be vigilant. That's the beauty of it. You've got to constantly participate and be vigilant. That's what the whole process is about.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: [inaudible]

NADER: Yes. The question is, is OSPIRG gonna have any teeth in it? If it doesn't have any teeth in it, retire it. That's all, and you can retire it, start something else. It's going to have teeth for a lot of reasons. It's going to be composed of people sensitive to the dynamics of power, you see, people who not only say how do we build up popular pressure on institutions? How do we get

inside institutions to lend a hand to the conscious-stricken employees who want to help but are powerless. So it's a external-internal type of situation, as well as getting more and more facts into different different citizenship forums. You may hear all about the environment; for a lot of workers in this country, the environmental problem is something... largely it's foul-smelling or ugly-looking. Now once they see the slides, once they see the medical literature, once they are talked to in terms of the framework of their own work experience, you watch the transformation. Thank you very much. [applause]

SPEAKER: Ralph Nader will be in the gym at 10 o'clock, speaking at a more extended session to a bigger audience. See you there.

[background chatter]

[recording of second address begins]

BLAKE: Good morning. In the process of Mr. Nader's speech, if you have any questions at the end, would you please stand and speak as loud as you can, especially back in the back. I'd like you to say good morning to Mr. Ralph Nader, public advocate. [applause]

NADER: Thank you, Rusty, ladies and gentlemen. The subject of discussion today is how students can organize power groups in a society that'll have some effect. There are a lot of problems in the organization. There are no problems of course, I think, in having students achieve a appreciation of the need for something of this order. We don't have to go through the grisly details in the area of racism and rotting cities and housing and medical care and pollution and consumer fraud and all the rest of it, to indicate to something fundamentally wrong in the institutional response in this country, whether private or public, to the yawning needs of large groups of people and needs of most everybody. That in many ways, a country is suffocating on its own affluence, tremendous scientific and technological capability applied almost everywhere but where the needs of 200 million Americans are. Technology applied to the moon, defense systems, computer applications for merchandising and production, automated production systems. But how about mass transit, hospitals, medical care, court systems, housing, pollution? How about turning the computer into a democratic tool for citizens and consumers to plug into just like turning on the light in their homes? Technology has not come to the rescue of these pressing public needs. The laws in the country are violated by powerful interest groups with such abandon that the violations have become institutionalized, not just episodic.

The students who worked with us in Washington, for example, at the beginning of the summer, come back and say they've documented a massive illegality in the pesticide area, pollution area, food and drug area. A few weeks later, they come back with wonderment in their voice saying that they've documented a compliance with the law. It's the compliance that is the deviation from the norm, not the violation.

The costs here are enormous, but they come in modern styles. And so they're not seen as really severe costs by a large number of Americans. For example, if pollution came in the form of fine red paint, and all the smokestacks were spewing forth red paint, smearing people's homes and cars and clothes, there'd be an uproar. But it doesn't come that way. It comes in much deadlier ways, silent, invisible ways. Carbon monoxide. You can't see it, smell it, taste it. It's violence. Violence to tissue and cell structure and bone and blood. Violence in a very, very profound way. The same is true for radiation, hydrocarbons, nitrogen oxides. Now society is generating thousands of sources of violence to people and their property, outstripping the adequacy of the laws, but more important, outstripping the sensitivity of human beings to these forms of violence. It's easy to say that biologically we're obsolete. We react primarily to more primitive forms of violence, like fires, but not to the gases and chemicals and particulate matters, that not only affect most everybody, but they have a nasty tendency of affecting the poor, the working classes, those who live and work in pollution-intense zones, far removed from the shrubberied suburbs, where the executives and plant managers set up their homes.

And it's important, I think, to recognize, that, quite apart from the frailties of mankind everywhere, the greed and venality and all the rest of it, the mere complexity of the system is hurtling the nation closer and closer to crisis levels and disaster levels in one area after another. Companies dump mercury into the water. It takes a graduate student in zoology at Western Ontario University to discover this. Not the government, not corporations who suppressed it. Not people working in the corporations, not those fabled workers, those blue-collar workers who knew what they were doing and they kept their mouths shut too, because they have been so anesthetized. They have so been stripped of their own conscience, their ability to make moral decisions in a gigantic organization. It took a graduate student in zoology writing a thesis on mercury content in Lake Erie fish, that blew the whistle and led to the discovery of mercury pollution in 32 states, poisoning water and fisheries all around the country, and who knows what the devastating effect will be in the future. You don't need, like your more immediate predecessors need, to be told these details. If there's anything that's occurred in the last five years, it's that people and students are aware of what's going on. They're no longer being brainwashed, or diverted or detoured, as proficiently as they once were into the world of white bucks, fraternity parties, and razzmatazz football games and the like, that still absorbs the majority. [applause]

But there's a nagging question that remains: will student action arms, funded by students, controlled by students, subjected to further recall powers on the part of the broader student constituency, will these student action arms absorb 1/10 of what The Fifth Dimension, Sly and the Family Stone, and the other rock groups absorb of the student budget, or Coca-Cola, or Lucky Strike or Pall Mall? And all the rest of it? We've got to look at the following objective here. There is nobody that's going to improve this country except ourselves. There is nobody that's going to develop the self-discipline and the commitment except ourselves. No longer can we expect so-called "representative institutions" to respond. They have been taken over, from their symbolisms to their daily operations by parochial interest groups, the electric... the state utilities regulating electric utilities and telephones. Who are they responsive to? Who do they meet every day? Who do they go to the clubs with? Who do they find jobs in after they're finished with their on-the-job training called government service?

The same is true in Washington, the pollution agencies. If there's been any progress, it's been directly related to citizen and community action pressure. And thus far that pressure isn't 1/10 of 1% of what it could be, and what it should be. And so I think we need some new perceptions. One is a quantitative concept of democratic power. If ten people don't do it, that doesn't mean fifty won't; we've got to develop that incremental type of power. The second that citizenship engagement is no longer an avocation. It's got to be a very militant obligation, on the job and off the job. The ability of institutions to resist external pressures for change is commensurate with the inability of people inside these institutions to blow the whistle on them. And if you can develop external and internal pressures, you can increase the leverage of any professional action arm or any citizen action arm immensely.

Who knows the secrets of industry? Employees know plenty. Right down to the assembly line. The fact that there were two and a half million defective Chevrolets was known by an inspector at the Fisher body plant in St. Louis, blew the whistle. Recalled two and a half million. A minor thing as far as the major challenges go, but suppose 100 inspectors had done that in their area just once in their careers. Suppose people in government, suppose people in other institutions looked at themselves in the following way. If I'm going to be an individual, with a conscience, with a semblance of citizenship integrity, there must come a time when the line will be drawn beyond the point that no longer will the unjust dictates of the organization that employs me will be tolerated, and I'll blow the whistle. The allegiance to the society at large supersedes the allegiance to the organization. And then an ethic of whistleblowing can be developed and supported and protected from the kinds of pressures that will accrue to that kind of action. We'll have a very, very measurable dimensional move forward in disciplining and making institutions more accountable.

Some, of course, don't deserve even that treatment. There are some that are so corrupt, they've got to be replaced or displaced. But let me point out the following. No power system, whatever way you structure it, is going to be accountable unless its constituency involves itself in the operations. Take a government agency, take a post office. The post office, very difficult institution these days, having trouble delivering the mail; it is inefficient. There are tremendous parochial pressures in that post office. You take other agencies and government here and abroad, there is a bureaucratic momentum operating even if there isn't a special interest group taking over, the momentum, the bureaucratic momentum internally, will begin acting against the public interest. There's no escape that no matter how you structure power, unless you put in the hands of individual citizens and people initiatory power to provoke, to expel, to expose to mandate, and then any system is going to begin deteriorating and quite rapidly as well.

Initiatory power is simple to understand. The most explicit expression of it is picketing. That's only the beginning. Initiatory power is power that any citizen or any citizen group can invoke just because he wants or they want to. It doesn't depend on what their family background is, what color they are, what affluence they may possess. That is the essential test of democracy in any system. Whether you call it socialism, capitalism, corporate socialism, whatever the names go by these days. None of it is going to work without that kind of initiatory power, which means that we have to develop a society in the following context. If we're given rights, we automatically must be given remedies, and legal and other professional representation. There are no two ways about it. We all go through our utopian stages when we wished everything was as it was in a simpler day. Unless we roll back centuries of complex social development and technologies, we're going to have to agree; we're gonna have to concentrate on building meticulous power centers on a focused basis, in one area and region and problem area and on one institution after another. There is no escape. At the present time most citizens spend—how much of their time in a given year, is on citizenship action? What would you say—an hour a year on the average? Doesn't that prove that the system can't be changed or displaced? That's real proof, isn't it? It's like trying to take on a football team, with the center only. There's an incremental aspect to this, there's a quantitative aspect to it. And that's what has to be tried. There aren't many models for you to emulate, or to copy. In many ways, this is the pioneering dimension. And in many ways, you've got to do it and start it yourself.

You've got to start it basically by recognizing the following facts. Most of us are as apathetic as our elders, there's not much difference. Clothes may be different, styles. Basically, attitude: can't fight city hall, can't fight GM, forget about it, get along by going along. A few minority students have gotten other objectives in mind; they feel something can be done. The point is basically of course not to make this a two- or three-percentile situation. The point is to look at

the student population in this country, 8 million strong: look at the idealism, the concerns, as well as the weaknesses and the apathy and say, “How can this power be linked in such a way as to really be focused, strategically oriented?” And the way to do it is simply to recognize that you can set up your own professional action arms, many of them from your own ranks, which will take on a full-time basis, the cyclical and up and down and fractionated concerns of students and drive them home, building these kinds of power levers. Not just what these people in the action arm can do, but they will metabolize all your energies, or the ones that you care to lend to them.

They will, in effect, have repercussive effects, every step that they move forward can be utilized by a lot of other people. If we develop, for example, landlord-tenant rights in one area for tenants, then people who are worried about hazards of crumbling tenements, poisoning of Black children with lead peeling off the walls and the like, they will be able to use those same levers. Or if the development is in that area, other people can use those same levers. And what it really means is that procedural and substantive change is like a currency, it's fungible. Victory for one victim is victory for most people, and the process of getting victims to have these victories, the process whereby there'll be no victimization without representation—which is the ultimate definition of a democracy—will begin coming alive.

For many years now, students have gone through two intolerable stages, one of them converging. The *in locis parentis* stage where students who are old enough to, as a story goes, fight, incur debts, et cetera, and be used as scapegoats, are not old enough to assume responsibilities. And they are in a position of *in locis parentis*, where the university is in the place of the parent over them. That did more than anything else to require Americans twenty-five to thirty years to grow up. Other quote “more primitive societies” give responsibilities to people, and at a much earlier age, some as low as fourteen, sixteen, eighteen, twenty. In fact, many of the institutions developed in this country came out of the minds of twenty-eight and thirty-two-year-old people, but now you're not ready to get into motion until you're twenty-five or twenty-seven, largely because of that kind of treatment.

But more recently, a more pernicious attitude towards students has developed. Didn't you know that you're responsible for most of the problems in the country? [laughter] I mean, look at the problems, will you, just listed from the front pages of the paper: Vietnam, inflation, contamination of the environment, billions of dollars of consumer fraud, monopolization, price fixing, corporate illegalities, government corruption, the exiling of old people—get them out of mind out of sight, dump them into nursing homes, many of which are like snake pits—a cruel medical delivery system, courts that are congested, you know, list 'em all. Of course, you know, don't you that they're all attributable to Mr. Agnew's hippies, yuppies, malcontents and

discontents? [laughter; applause] How nice it would be, would it not, if all we had to do to spot our problems is to put a beard and a pair of sandals on them.

They go much deeper, they go much deeper. And the ability of change agents is the ability to separate out the following. Take out your rage over what led to these problems after you've understood the institutions and the power systems that have contributed and led and refuse to change and diminish these problems. Then put that indignation aside, and face up to the toughest issue of all, that can we do anything in this country? As long as millions of Americans spend billions of hours wasting their time? Frittering their energies, throwing down the drain their material resources. And isn't it true that if we're going to change, it's got to be a bootstrap operation? It's got to be a new lifestyle, a new commitment, a new engagement? It's a personal question to ask. If you don't want to do it as a full-time career, how good are you inside an organization? Are you ready to blow the whistle? Are you willing—ready to cooperate with your colleagues on the outside who have thrown aside the status symbols and have risked and pioneered to engage these full-time professional-type careers? Those are the questions that have to be answered.

You can always spot a political demagogue from whatever hue he may come from ideologically. He is wrapped up in praising people. Oh, how he praises Americans. Oh, the common people, oh, how they praise him. It's only the leadership. That's all. Well, whatever may have led us to these problems, it's gonna have to be straight talk to people to basically tell them that they are surrendering the potentials and the levers and the power that can change the situation. So much so that they don't even know they're surrendering, that they look on the few who are out there fighting the good fight as eccentrics and mavericks and radicals and the like—so much so that they are blinded by the most superficial and emotional propaganda. If it's unpatriotic to tear the flag down, why isn't it unpatriotic to poison and despoil and destroy the air, land, and water that is America? [applause]

If it's violence to throw a rock through a bank window, why isn't it violence to continually permit, if not be responsible, for starving Black and brown children, for diseased people, for people who are crushed with the institutional cruelty of their environment and neighboring power centers. If you want to talk about violence, talk about it quantitatively. Air pollution: 14 times more property-destroying in a given year than crime in the streets. All the riots in all our cities in the last five years: \$700 million in damage, 350 fatalities. That is one and a half months' damage on the highway. And that is two and a half days' toll on the highway. Most of which could be prevented by a humane technology in the design and construction of motor vehicles. In short, take these values, take the so-called traditional values: abhorrence of violence, law observance, non-corruption of government, quality competition, freedom of entry, freedom of

opportunity, access to the courts with legal representation; take them all and see who's violating them the most.

The most radical institutions in the country are the massive corporations engaged in systematic illegalities, producing environmental violence, keeping people from being able to change their lives, because nobody's countervailed them. Nobody has infiltrated them. Nobody has, in effect, studied them. Nobody has developed power systems against them. And you can take any power system, and it can start out with a halo. And if it has nobody countervailing it, nobody monitoring it, nobody inside willing to blow the whistle, it's going to become corrupt. I cite you some of our major labor unions, remote from the rank and file, bureaucratized, often corrupt, in collusion with the industry that it was supposed to be countervailing. These are the most essentially democratic institutions on paper. And they failed.

The development of the Oregon Student Public [Interest] Research Group is a very important development for the following. It's not what they do for you. It's what it does to you. It faces you up to it. Are you willing to develop this kind of stamina? Are you willing to recognize the problems? Are you willing to change your lifestyle? To downplay your priorities? Are you willing basically to be pioneers in the most fundamental unglamorous way; that's really what this group will do. They'll win some victories, they'll articulate some issues. But they'll change the spirit of the curriculum, the relevance of the courses, the independent work; you'll get out of the library where you get together a critical mass of footnotes in order to innocently plagiarize your paper, and you'll get into the field. [applause]

And then go back to the library to see how good those theories are, to see how obsolete many of the materials are, to see how propagandized they are. I learned about the oil industry, in the elementary schools by reading colorful brochures put out by the American Petroleum Institute. I learned about the Federal Reserve Board at Princeton by reading materials put out by the Federal Reserve Board, which is like an accounts receivable for the private banking industry. That's what the importance of this group is.

Now I know there are a lot of obstacles. I heard one coming in, one fella said, lawyers are ipso facto going to be politicians. I don't like the smell of this. But let me give you a few pointers, see if you agree with them. First of all, there's risk in any endeavor, isn't there? You don't simply project problems, say, "Oh, well, we won't take the step." I mean, that doesn't work in the athletic arena, in the social arena. It doesn't work in *any* arena. The point is, to recognize there are going to be problems, anticipate some of them structurally, and anticipate the rest by keeping tabs and control. The way OSPIRG is organized, you've got a recall power, you've got campus public hearings to develop the priorities, you've got a nice flow, a nice out, and you

don't have a persistent bureaucracy, and control is a constant turnover. Furthermore, you've got the power of the purse over the lawyers and ecologists and accountants, not just lawyers, a whole range of technical and professional people. You've got the power of the purse over them.

The point is, of course, that we've got to look on citizenship action as a power-building challenge full time. You know, we look at physics, engineering, almost any endeavor: continually, you got to practice day after day after day, in one area after another from the athletic to the scientific. The same is true here. It's going to take that kind of involvement and that kind of work. We've developed certain techniques now in Washington which get things done much quicker than four or five years ago. So they're small. So there are about twenty-four lawyers against 10,000. What will happen if there are 400, 700? I've always said one public interest lawyer can keep ten special interest lawyers working overtime on weekends. You've got a tremendous reservoir here of talent, but it isn't being directed. You're not directing your talents. It's dissipating.

Look at environmental Earth Day. Everybody then, the press and everybody said, "It's going to be a fad. It's gonna be a fad." The students who ran it said, "Oh, no, no fad, because it's going to constantly get worse". Do you know that that student organization that set up Earth Day—and you should see how hard they worked in Washington night after night after night—they're about ready to go out of business? Because they can't get any more support. It *was* a fad. And all of these are going to be fads. And you're going to become just like the older generation. Because if you don't make the break now in style and commitment, you're not going to make it later on with family responsibilities and with all the invisible chains that wrap around you. You've got to make it now, whether you believe it or not, this is as free, as idealistic, as risk-taking as you'll ever be.

Now I don't want to be melodramatic. The worst thing to do is to project some sort of euphoric objective, but I will say this. In a very literal sense, the Oregon effort is first. Other people and other groups, student groups around the country are watching, some cynically, some not. Others will take the cue and roll with it if this one goes and goes big. Now, let me just say it is not *the* only thing you do. It's one thing. It's one thing; it's an awfully powerful experiment. And you can't lose. Why? Because if you go after, say, various abuses, and the institutions or companies that are involved retract and begin retreating, you move in and you develop your momentum, more and more progress. Suppose they slug back, as they're likely to. You can't lose there either. The more they slug back, the more the ugly face of power becomes apparent to more students, and to more people. [applause]

The less the apathy, the less the resignation, the greater the roles, the greater the people who are willing to be a part of this, you're in a no-lose situation. And you know, if you look through history, and you ask yourself what kind of sacrifices people had to make to get ourselves to the point where we're at now. And of course, it could be a lot worse—which is no excuse, but it could be an awful lot worse—to get us to the point where we are now. What is the level of sacrifice? Immensely greater than now. Never have the problems been more potentially catastrophic. Because we now live in a society which could destroy itself inadvertently, domestically, which is a unique power to mankind. Nevermind all the rest of it, the cruelty and finality of it. Just inadvertently, domestically, we could plunge along; that never have these problems been so catastrophic over the generational span. And never have people been asked to give up so little. Do you know any abuse in this country that has suffered from an excess of citizen or community action? Do you know any evidence to say that it won't work?

There are two easy ways to go through life, you know. One is to believe everything, the other is to disbelieve everything. And they both avoid thinking. The point is, we need these kinds of developments and these kinds of experiments; the kinds that will fail only by virtue of your own inadequacy. That's the only kind of failure that's instructive. Your best teacher is your last mistake. And that's the kind of temperament and stamina and clinching, grasping of the problems that's necessary.

Now, I know that there are differences among certain students here. And elsewhere. Let me say two things. All these problems can't be handled in the initial stages by the public action group; they'll have to be priorities decided upon in the most democratic way. But as I say, when you win a victory for one victim, you win it for many; when you blaze open a path for one, others can come and use that same path. It isn't an either-or situation. It's an incremental, accreting type of situation.

And second, probably one of the worst problems to overcome apart from apathy, is the ingenious ability of victims to fight against one another. Victimizations of processes, whether you're required to compulsorily consume environmental pollution, in which case we're all victims, or in one institutional framework or another up and down the economic ladder. This kind of fighting between victims has sapped and impaired, throughout history, one drive after another. The basic criteria of leaving a reform or change or action drive alone, if you don't disagree with it, is whether it in effect spreads forward the horizons for justice on all fronts; whether in its own area, it will improve the possibilities of change in other areas that you may be more interested in. And that's the main criteria, I think, that the minimal type of tolerance is needed. Otherwise, the kinds of conflicts and disagreements between various groups will destroy any effort and its incipency.

And I would urge you to recognize that once a group like this is set up, there will be a great emulation effect around the country. And you'll be able to see how any group—if it's going to be effective—it's going to have to be unbureaucratic, it's gonna have to be nonpartisan in a political party sense, it's going to have to have a concept of linkage effects, repercussive effects, the ability to generate power in other institutions, the ability to take voiceless, but well-intentioned people inside institutions, give them a hand, get their information, and forge new drives for it. In other words, a kind of repercussive power that takes twenty people, backed by thousands of students, a much longer way than if they just kept themselves in a tunnel vision and put in a full day's work. That's the kind of strategy to develop.

If you think physics has come a long way since Archimedes, citizenship hasn't. And that's what you need to look at it as: a frontier that has hardly been probed. A frontier that has been smothered with slogans and non-representative institutions, and one that you've got to begin working meticulously. U.S. Steel is not a part-time polluter; it pollutes all the time. And the kind of reaction to those kinds of situations has got to be systematic. Otherwise, they'll wait you out. It's just a fad. That's what companies said in April, just a fad, just bounce over it, give them a few palliatives. The only way to overcome that is to put this situation on a full-time career basis, full-time professional advocacy. Growing, developing support structures, volunteers, and the tremendous power that students can focus.

I'll tell you one thing quite clearly. If students assessed themselves across the country \$3 a head, the way you are contemplating, they would be the most single powerful group in the nation, bar none, bar none—oil lobby, highway lobby, all the rest—because none of them have got the manpower, the commitment, the drive, and the idealistic risk-taking that can match the student population, once it's oriented, and mobilized, and it's got that kind of metabolism. Nothing can compare with it. In the first place, you've got the biggest stake in the country. In the second place, you're on the frontiers of research. In the third place, you're on the frontiers of humane value development. But you've got the same problems that have affected young people throughout history: you're gonna dissipate, you're gonna drop out, you're gonna give up, you're gonna engage in all the vanities of idealistic dilettantism, unless you see yourself in a rubric of self-discipline and commitment and engagement on a personal level, so that it can amount to a great deal on a collective level. Thank you. [applause]

One more thing, there are tables out there for you to sign. Sign if you really want to. Think. Think about it. Ask questions, find out what it's about. Because the tougher you make it for yourself, the more engaged you're going to become in the final objective. This has every indication of being the largest student support of any proposal anywhere in the country. But we

want more than student support—you want more than student support—it's engagement that's important. And those who have other proposals to make: there should be thirty, forty of these kinds of groups on campus. And that's what's going to develop; this isn't going to be exclusive. There are going to be others. But if you don't break the ice once, you're not going to break it again and again and again. So please hear what the students who have been working in this area and the last few weeks have to say and have to suggest. And for that, I'll turn it over to Rusty.

SPEAKER: I think Mr. Nader has made really clear that OSPIRG is not an organization on campus that's asking students for a dollar. OSPIRG is the students, the students giving their resources to solve some of the problems that he stated so succinctly here today. There are tables outside with petitions, petitions for you to take to get signatures on, petitions for you to sign. We have an office in 438 Smith Center for any of you who would like to come up and talk to us about getting involved. We'll have room 323 and 324 Smith Center until one o'clock today for those of you who'd like to come and get more information about specifically what we're doing.

[background chatter]

He's late... to Corvallis.

SPEAKER: May I have your attention please? The speak—

[audio cuts out; microphone feedback]

The speakers' committee would like to invite you to a second presentation today. John C. Kimball, the Senior Editor of Publications for the Department of State will be here in the North lounge at 12 o'clock, discussing geopolitics and answering all of your questions as to what the government is up to in the foreign field. Thank you.

[background chatter]

[program ends at 01:12:01]