Ralph Nader

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Dear Friend:

As the presidential race unfolds this year, it appears that insurgent efforts against corporate power from within the Democratic Party are being crushed or ignored.

Indeed, it looks like it may be more of the same from a party that has become very good at electing very bad Republicans by continuing to lose. This is evidenced by the losses in the congressional races of 2002, not to mention the many lost governorships and state legislative races throughout the country in the last ten years.

The Democrats voted overwhelmingly for the Patriot Act and for an unconstitutional, costly, avoidable war-quagmire, and declined, in the Senate, to stop Bush's huge tax cuts for the wealthy that have enlarged the deficit to record, destabilizing levels. The frontrunners will have trouble contrasting their party on these and other major issues with the present selected President.

To defeat George W. Bush in 2004, we may need a two-front challenge. That's why I am exploring an Independent run for the President as someone not beholden to corporate paymasters.

After listening to the candidates on C-SPAN Radio and reading about their records, I made a list of many fundamental necessities of the American people that are not being addressed – subjects which can defeat Bush, such as:

1. Universal health insurance – a single payer system to drastically cut waste and emphasize quality and prevention;
2. A serious drive to abolish poverty using long-known policies;
3. A living wage for the tens of millions of full-time workers making under $10 per hour, many in the $5.15 to $8 range, and long overdue labor rights reform;
4. An adequately funded crackdown on corporate crime, fraud and abuse that have resulted in the cheating of trillions of dollars from taxpayers, investors, pension holders and consumers, plus specific corporate reforms;
5. A comprehensive and determined nurturing of the physical and educational needs of children;
6. Full public financing of public elections and other electoral reforms: the most important way to reclaim our democracy from the control of big business, two-party domination, and thefts of elections, as in Florida 2000;
7. Reform of the criminal injustice system and defense of those precious pillars of our democracy – civil liberties, civil rights and civil remedies for wrongful

injuries – under relentless assault by autocratic corporations and their political allies;

8. A redirected federal budget for the crucial priorities of our country, away from the massive waste, fraud and redundancy of what President Eisenhower called the "military-industrial complex," and away from massive corporate subsidies;

9. A multi-faceted foreign policy to wage multilateral peace and promote arms control, plus employing the many assets of our country's knowledge base to lift prospects for impoverished people abroad;

10. The crises resulting from huge agribusiness domination of food production that wreaks near total destruction on the small family farm and has far-reaching consequences for land and water policy in America and the world.

11. A novel, structured drive from within our political system to expand and harness the civic energies of the American people by providing ways for the citizenry to organize as workers, consumers and small taxpayers and investors.

12. An unyielding guiding philosophy that safeguarding our environment and the multitude of species in it must take precedence over wasteful commercial values, and, indeed, is the only way human endeavors will last on this Earth.

We have so many <u>problems</u> in our country that we do not deserve and so many <u>solutions</u> that we do not apply because of the democracy gap – <u>too much power and wealth in too few hands</u>. In looking over the above list, you probably added other items, such as:

- Can't we seriously pursue energy efficiency and renewable solar? Of course we can. Instead, the new energy legislation is going backward to costly oil, gas and nuclear boondoggles.
- Can't we solve our housing problem for the millions of households who can't afford the rents or can't escape the gentrification and sprawl? I, with many others, believe so.
- Can't we direct much of our clogged highway congestion into modern public transit as repeatedly urged by some of our best engineers? Yes we can.
- What about repairing and building America's public works, such as schools, clinics, libraries, public parks and forests – which produce good, local jobs? And so forth.

It seems abundantly clear that the fresh and progressive directions I allude to would find great favor with the American people, if parties and candidates had the people's interests in mind above dirty money politics and their expedient electoral careers.

What is so troubling is that the parties have managed to either turn off the voters completely (100 million voters or 50% do not vote in Presidential elections, many more stay home during off-year Congressional elections), and have very low expectation levels about what government and politicians should be doing.

As you know, I have spent many years showing the young how to practice democracy, as for instance, the many student public interest research groups are now doing. This has also let me observe the rejection by millions of young Americans of their duty to vote, to enter the election process. There are reasons for this political "opt-out."

A crucial one is that the major parties do not engage this young generation of Americans in ways that prepare them for the future leadership of our country. **With a weakened polity, the takeover of our elections and governments by the corporate supremacists and their dominant commercial values have undermined the civil society and the democratic, honest governance which should spring from that society.**

People who agree with all of the above still tell me that the two major parties are the whole ball game. I tell them that throughout American history, third parties and independent candidates have pushed the agenda toward the just needs of the people. They changed one or more of the major parties on many important subjects – abolition of slavery, suffrage, deficits, agrarian rights, labor reforms, civil rights, and deficits to name just a few. Seeds of regeneration and great social movements have very often been sown from outside the two-party system.

People tell me, "Sure, but this is not the time to think such thoughts or say such words." I reply, "That's what I have been hearing for 40 years and every four years the two Parties get more corrupt, more into serving excessive corporate power and less into giving power to the people." They respond, "ANYBODY BUT BUSH."

I say, "Who is ANYBODY?" Don't you want to make sure that there is an independent force making ANYBODY someone other than 'business as usual' when entering that corporate occupied territory known as the White House? Someone made to heed mandates beyond the desperate, uni-dimensional mantra, "Anybody but Bush"?

Yes, George W. Bush has gotten away with terrible decisions and further damage to the fabric, security and justice of our society. But, why again and again, when these proposals were vulnerable, didn't Democratic opposition defeat or block them? Instead Bush enjoyed the support of many Democrats on foreign and domestic matters that are corroding our country's present and future. Neither party has put the people's agenda first.

Perhaps the overriding question for Democrats to ask themselves is what Bob Herbert asked in his *New York Times* column, last December 12th: Does the Party know how to win? Consider its dreary series of losses year after year, the House, the Senate, the White House, the Governorships – California, New York, Florida, Texas, Kentucky, even Massachusetts and so on? Does it not need collateral demonstration effects by a third political drive to show how to rouse the electorate to turnout for change?

And what about the Congress? Why are political reporters getting the impression that the Democrats have given up on recovering the Congress? Is it "redistricting determinism" – which removes about 95% of the House seats from contention? Who is going to challenge this determinism with an affirmative initiative to bring out more new voters to elect the better candidates for Congress?

Perhaps the overriding question for Republicans to ask themselves is: Does this Administration and Congress represent conservative values or just big corporate values,

with a total lack of fiscal prudence, rampant corporate welfare, a reckless foreign policy, and jeopardizing, as Bush's own Gilmore Commission warned, privacy and civil liberties in the guise of security? How far will those in control of Congress and the Executive branch go to stifle dissent inside the government and the country alike?

There are competing views as to whether it is advisable to "sit out" this election and pursue a least-worst strategy, or whether it is better to continue to build on 2000 and pull the major parties to pay real attention, for example, to the *pull-down effect* of corporate globalization on labor, the environment, consumers and our democratic processes.

There are dilemmas being expressed about the ever-closing door by the federal government over the past 25 years to many civic groups, who are trying to improve their country and whether the political doors should be pried open more through political campaigns. Should efforts by the American people directed toward "with liberty and justice for all" *ever* take a vacation from the *exercises* of freedom of speech and assembly within the electoral arena?

When I reflect on these aforementioned variables and many more, what comes to mind repeatedly are the massive unused assets of the American people – starting with their ownership but not control of the commonwealths that embody the public lands, the trillions in worker pensions, the public airwaves, public works and government research and development. Our bipartisan corporate government has ensured that these assets are controlled by large corporations, though owned by the people, in ways that nullify their wondrous contributions to present and future generations. These include sustainable economies, accountable corporations, and open communications. The corporate control of these commonwealths and their uses are rarely even mentioned by the major Parties and routinely shut out of the exclusionary, noncompetitive, so-called presidential debates.

Your help today is critical.

Enclosed is a card for your financial donations. We also have a barebones exploratory website to register suggestions, contributions, and leads on other people with whom we should talk: **www.naderexplore04.org.**

I am very grateful for your past support. Together we can make a difference.

Sincerely,

Ralph Nader

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P.S. Contributions will be used for the exploratory effort budget (research, staff, events and travel). **If I do decide to run, contributions of $250 or less may qualify for matching funds.**

Paid for by the Nader 2004 Presidential Exploratory Committee, Inc.
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