Nader, Ralph American Consumer Advocate and Environmentalist (1934-) Encyclopedia Article

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Nader, Ralph American Consumer Advocate and Environmentalist (1934–)

When a young Ralph Nader wrote a book about automobile safety, it made him a household name across America. The experience sparked a lifetime of service to numerous safety, political, and environmental causes.

One of the consumer activist's first major accomplishments involved the formation of the Public Interest Research Groups (PIRGs) in the 1970s. These student-led groups, funded by college activity fees and supported by paid professional staffs, serve as law offices working in the public's interest. PIRGs operate today in twenty-four U.S. states, tackling issues such as recycling, pollution, and public health and safety.

Nader's work also played a major role in the creation of the Coal Mine Health and Safety Act and the Occupational Safety and Health Act, both of which continue to save lives. His other early work focused on food safety, nursing homes, and water and air pollution.

Ralph Nader. (Alex Wong/Getty Images. Reproduced by permission.)

Arguably, the most effective group that Nader founded is Public Citizen. This organization, with the support of 150,000 members, serves as a lobbying group—working to present ideas and critical information to members of Congress, all in an effort to persuade them to vote in favor of public-interest issues and, many times, against the wishes of major U.S. corporations.

Nader also led the fight against nuclear power in the 1970s and 1980s. He, Public Citizen, and other groups that he helped form played a major role in stopping the spread of nuclear power.

In 1996 and 2000, Nader ran for president on the Green Party ticket and brought his views on environmental issues and social justice to a larger audience. Nader's campaign played a role in the close 2000 election as he pushed a progressive agenda and brought plenty of new people—many of them young—into the political process. He continues his work today from an office in Washington, D.C.

Bibliography

Graham, Kevin. (2000). *Ralph Nader: Battling for Democracy.* Denver: Windom Publishing.

Internet Resource

Essential Information. Available from http://www.essential.org.