

All Ears with Abigail Disney
Season 4 Episode 1: Robert Reich
Fighting the Bullies (Corporate and Otherwise)
Airdate: February 2, 2023

Robert Reich:

Well, hello, hello, hello.

Abigail Disney:

How nice to meet you in person, finally.

Robert Reich:

Well, Abby, it's great to meet you finally, too.

Abigail Disney:

Can I call you Bob? Is that alright?

Robert Reich:

Oh yes. Whatever you want to. And how would you like me to address you?

Abigail Disney:

Abby is great.

Robert Reich:

Okay, good.

Abigail Disney:

It's really nice to meet you by the way. I'm just like a huge fan.

Abigail Disney:

Hi all, I'm Abigail Disney and welcome to All Ears. In recent months, I've been on the road with my new documentary, *The American Dream and Other Fairy Tales*. In the film, I tell the stories of some Disney workers to show how the American Dream has become a nightmare for so many. Of course, the problem is not just with Disney. Today, nearly half of all American workers are struggling to make ends meet. That's why in this season of All Ears, I'll be taking a deep dive into some of the big questions raised in the film with folks who are doing the most Disney thing possible, using their imaginations in this case to rethink modern American capitalism because if we don't re imagine how it all works, and fix it, we're going to be in big trouble.

Abigail Disney:

Well, I know you have a hard out, so we should get straight to it, because I have lots, lots, and lots of things to ask you.

Robert Reich:

Oh, good. Terrific.

Abigail Disney:

Ok so, Robert Reich has spent a lifetime writing, teaching, talking practically begging us to pay attention to the subject of inequality in America.

He has served in multiple capacities across multiple presidential administrations. These days, though, he's best known for being, as the New York Times cheekily called him, a multi-platform gadfly. Indeed, he's found ways to reach millions, through his 18 books, countless articles and policy papers, documentaries, social media posts, TikTok videos, and daily Substack missives. Not to mention his eye-opening animations made at his production company called Inequality Media.

Are you tired? I am so tired from reading that list. I think he's one of the most effective communicators on the ways the economy and our political system clash and intertwine, most often to the tremendous disadvantage of the less fortunate.

He is also a wildly popular professor of public policy at UC Berkeley, and a Senior Fellow at the Blum Center for Developing Economies. Welcome! I'm so delighted to talk with you because if ever there were anyone who could help us think through what's happened to capitalism and reimagine a better future, it's you.

Robert Reich:

Well, Abby, thank you. Thank you for inviting me and thank you for the work that you continue to do.

Abigail Disney:

Well, we all need to fight with everything we got right? Because this is big.

Robert Reich:

Absolutely.

Abigail Disney:

So, let me start with this personal question. It seems obvious that people should care about fairness and inequality, but most people don't really do the work of fairness and inequality. So what makes you different? Why do you do this work? What brought you to it?

Robert Reich:

Oh, I suppose, I get a little bit embarrassed doing too much personal introspection, but I've always been very short for my age and grew up as a kid getting, you know, bullied as most children do. But I was particularly bullied because of my, my short stature. And I suppose that made me, as I think back on it, particularly concerned about the people who are being bullied in our society.

People who don't have very much in terms of assets or resources. People whose bosses treat them as if they don't even exist or are not important. People who really are caught in a system that is rigged against them in so many ways. So there's a lot of bullying in society and I guess that must be connected in some way to my own experiences.

Abigail Disney:

You know, I read something, that one of the people who helped you out when you were being bullied was Michael Schwerner. Is that true?

Robert Reich:

Yes, the technique I used, finally, to keep the bullies at bay was to ask some older boys, one or two, to just become my protectors. I kind of had a little protection racket going on.

Abigail Disney:

Yeah. Nice.

Robert Reich:

When I was a young kid, and one of them was Michael Schwerner, who I got to know a little bit, because his family had a cabin in the Adirondack Mountains near where my grandmother had a cabin.

And I spent time with her and I got to know him a little bit. And of course, in 1964, the summer of 1964, he was registering voters in Mississippi as a Freedom Rider, when he, along with two other civil rights workers, were brutally murdered. I was just entering college and I felt that the person who was trying to keep the bullies away from me had succumbed to the real bullies in society, the people who were trying to keep a system of racial repression, subjugation, really a form of slavery, still in place.

And that, as I look back on it, I don't think I was fully aware of it at the time, but I think that his murder catapulted me into activism.

Abigail Disney:

I can see how it would do that. One of the things that frustrates me when we talk about, you know, fairness and the overuse and misuse of strength and power, is we find ourselves in this zone of talking about how people should be, or shouldn't be, or how things should be arranged.

And I sometimes feel dismissed really easily, when I'm in that zone, because, you know, we are talking about business, we're talking about economy and science, and those things about fairness are just idealism.

How do you push back on that? How do you fight for the realness of this thing that can often be sort of dismissed as almost child-like idealism.

Robert Reich:

I agree with you. I have exactly the same, and run into the same issues you do. When I start talking about morality or fairness I get, from people who are in positions of power and wealth, I get, very often, a kind of skepticism back.

But, I don't think we should accept, those of us who are concerned about morality in the economy, accept the notion that morality is completely divorced from the economy. It is central to the economy. You can't really talk about the economy without talking about morality. An amoral or immoral economy self-destructs inevitably.

Abigail Disney:

Yes, yes, exactly. You and I are both old enough to have watched this expression, "Greed is Good," become something that wasn't outrageous or to be repudiated. We watched that happen. There was a shift in policy, of course, in the seventies, eighties, and nineties, that

changed the way our economy worked. But, maybe just as important, norms shifted, belief systems shifted. How would you describe that?

Robert Reich: Well, I think that the big U-turn occurred in the late seventies and 1980s, and I think it happened largely because finance took over the economy, Wall Street took over the economy. It started rather innocently, with a few 'corporate raiders,' we used to call them, now they're private equity managers, who took over companies with hostile takeovers.

Those companies could have, according to the takeover artists, done much better by their shareholders if they fired more workers, abandoned their communities, treated workers worse, lowered pay, outsourced abroad, did all sorts of things that ultimately they did do, because as CEOs became more and more vulnerable to these takeover artists, these CEOs discovered that they really had no choice but to maximize shareholder returns by severing all of the other moral commitments that corporations had: with their workers, with their communities, with the nation as a whole, with anybody else other than shareholders. And that really took root under President Reagan, particularly once he said to companies, in effect, "go ahead, bust unions." "Go ahead, make as much money as you could, or can."

And that notion that "Greed is Good" took root in the Reagan Administration at a time when a lot of the nation was beginning to get disillusioned with the economy. Things were not doing as well as they were before. A lot of people were losing their jobs. We had double digit inflation in the 1970s going into a very deep recession starting in the 1980s.

And I think that it was that combination that led the way to this takeover of the economy by those who felt that supply-side economics, that is, if you reduce the taxes on people at the top, you make them even wealthier, everything will trickle down somehow to everybody else.

Well, it was a lie from the beginning. It was a complete hoax from the start. But it was one of the lies, one of the methods that those who were gaining a great deal of wealth in the economy began to use to justify their wealth. And of course then it was a vicious cycle. It snowballed in effect.

Abigail Disney:

Would you say that supply-side economics, the trickle-down narrative, is synonymous with neoliberalism? Are they one and the same, or are they different things?

Robert Reich:

Well, I think there's certainly overlapping. I don't know exactly what neoliberalism is in the sense that, I certainly know that globalization, privatization of what had been public resources, the changing of our political economy and all of the rules of our political economy toward making the rich even richer, allowing huge amounts of campaign contributions to rig the system.

Well, that all, to me, is part of neoliberalism. And it's part of what has happened, certainly over the last 40 years. It's also one of the reasons that the typical worker in the United States has not seen, adjusted for inflation, any real increase in their wages, while people at the top have done extraordinarily well, in fact, have never done as well in history.

The ratio of CEO pay to the pay of the typical worker went from about 20 to one in the 1960s, when I began looking at these kinds of things, to now 320 to one in large companies,

certainly. And, you get, in almost every facet of American life, this widening gap. Young people I teach today, Abby, they see a world in which there's a shrinking middle class.

And they worry, obviously, they worry. They're not only worried about economics, they're also worried about global climate change, they're worried about many things. But they look at the economic picture and they see there are huge gains to be made at the top if they become investment bankers, or they go into hedge funds or they go into private equity, or management consulting.

But if they follow their hearts into, say, the arts or into social work or into whatever else their hearts tell them they want to do, they may face, they fear, poverty, or the possibility of poverty. And, of course, that means you have even more talent, young people going into places, professions, occupations, where they can do the smallest good and not going to places, where they can do huge good.

Abigail Disney:

You know when you talk about companies chasing profits the way that they have is this pushback saying, "Well, isn't that what they're supposed to do? You know, chasing profits is just the whole point of an economy." But if a company doesn't have a higher purpose than that, then the economy doesn't have a higher purpose than that.

And if the economy doesn't have a higher purpose than that, then there really is no reason to pay a teacher or an artist, or a social worker, anything at all, really, because they're not generating revenues. So, the question is does a corporation have a higher purpose? Should the economy have a higher purpose? What is that? What does that mean?

Robert Reich:

It's a very good and fundamental question. I've basically given up on the notion of corporate social responsibility. I think it's used as a kind of public relations gimmick more than anything else. But I really don't want companies to pollute our politics. I tell CEOs and anybody else who will listen, if you really want to behave in a responsible way, if you really believe in social responsibility, then stop making campaign contributions and join the movement to get big money out of politics.

Abigail Disney:

I'm gonna come back to big money in politics in a second, but let's talk for a second about corporate profits right now. I mean, corporations have always been, for the most part, profitable. What's going on right now that's different?

Robert Reich:

Well, over the last two and a half years, corporations have racked up the largest profits we've seen, certainly in the last 40 years. And the data are a little bit hard to compare apples and oranges before that time. But certainly we know that over the last 40 years, corporations have become more profitable. But we've never seen anything like the last few years. And these days, particularly when people are paying through the nose for energy, for fuel, for gas at the gas pumps.

We know that those corporate profits are not natural. They are driving much of the inflation we now are experiencing. And, as a result, there's almost a direct transfer of wealth, if you will, from the average person to the oil companies, to the big food processors, to others monopolizing America.

The core reason that American companies have become so profitable is because of the monopolization that they are doing of the economy overall. They are taking over industries and the government has not pushed back against this, I think partly because the government has been bought off.

Abigail Disney:

So where's this money going, exactly? I mean, I presume it's coming into the companies in the form of cash. Then where does the cash go?

Robert Reich:

Well, the cash does not go into new investment, for the most part. It would be one thing if the companies were becoming more productive and helping the economy function in some way we could talk about ethically.

It would be another thing if they were going into wages. They're not going into wages. No.

The profits are going into stock buybacks, by and large.

Abigail Disney:

Hmm.

Robert Reich:

And what that means is a company is using its profitability to, in buying back its own stock, its own shares of stock, increasing the value of the remaining shares of stock. In other words, this is a way of making investors even wealthier.

Now, I remember back, you, I'm sure you remember Abby, under the Bush administration, the second Bush administration, where George W. had the idea that everybody was in the stock market, or everybody could be in the stock market, and that everybody could rise together.

Well, that's simply wrong.

Abigail Disney: Right.

Robert Reich: 82% of the entire value of the stock market, is owned by the richest 10% of Americans. And the richest 1% of Americans owns over half of the value of the stock market owned by Americans. And that really provides context for understanding that when all of this money goes into the stock market to raise the value of stocks, it is not the average person who is benefiting.

It is people at the top. The people who are paying through the nose for groceries, for example, are average Americans or poor Americans. That's where you get the transfer of wealth. Upward.

Abigail Disney:

Well, the corollary to that is that if a share price is high, we can't necessarily assume that means the company's more valuable, right?

Robert Reich:

A company being more valuable doesn't have any necessary connection to the average person. I think we've got ourselves very, very confused between the real economy in which people live every day, the kitchen table economy and this financial economy. The financial economy doesn't have much to do with how most people live, what most people want, what they can do with their lives.

The financial economy exists at a level that, is not, is not real for most people.

Abigail Disney:

So in the fifties and sixties when a corporation was setting its budget for the year, what percent do you think, of its expenses, went to labor costs?

Robert Reich:

In the fifties and sixties, about 75% of a company's expenses went to labor in terms of paying wages. Today, it's closer to 65%, but it's still fairly large. And most companies, therefore, when they want to increase profits, the first place they look is their labor costs, their payrolls.

That's why we see so many efforts to cut wages. Elon Musk goes into Twitter. The first thing he does is he lays off half of the employees. The first thing most CEOs do when they take over a company is to look for ways of getting machines to replace workers or outsourcing the work abroad to lower wage workers around the world, or even to states that have, so called right-to-work statutes, which is a hilarious phrase because these states make it very difficult to form unions.

That's what the CEO today is doing, most of all in terms of trying to increase profits: it's cutting labor costs.

Abigail Disney:

Or by forcing more productivity out of the laborers that you already have. Right?

Robert Reich: Absolutely.

Abigail Disney: There's a bunch of ways. There are a million ways they're doing this and not just in terms of the amount of money that's on the check every week.

Robert Reich:

That's right. And instead of understanding that your workers are your most valuable asset. The workers at the frontline are the ones who know what's wrong, what's not doing well, what could be improved. It's the frontline workers who know the most. They're your most important human capital, they're your assets. But on the accounting, the kind of conventional accounting measures that corporations use, the workers are not considered assets to be nurtured, or developed, or trained. They're considered costs to be cut.

Abigail Disney:

So in terms of that 65%, that goes to labor. What goes to financial related costs now, because that really is one of the big changes since Wall Street took over.

Robert Reich:

The most important thing to understand is that the trend is toward more and more of what comes into a company, particularly in terms of profit margins, more and more of it is going into finance, and that's why you get these extraordinary amounts of money going to people who go into finance, whether, again, it's hedge fund managers or private equity managers, or it's traders.

The financial sector of the 1960s, when I began looking at all of this in some detail, was a fairly boring place. It was a place where, not a place where a lot of money was made.

In fact, Wall Street was the handmaiden of industry. Wall Street existed to help industry. Now, basically the private sector is the handmaiden of Wall Street, handmaiden of finance. Finance runs the show.

Abigail Disney:

So, when we're talking about inflation, I mean, how bad is it right now? And so many people are pointing at wages as the reason for inflation. What, what is really driving inflation right now?

Robert Reich:

Wages are not driving inflation because wage gains have been less than price increases. In fact, wage gains, over the last two years, have been about 5.5%, while the price increases have been about 8%, so that the typical worker is losing ground. The typical worker has less purchasing power than he or she had two years ago, or five years ago. So, this whole notion of wage-price inflation that you hear coming from Jerome Powell, the Chair of the Fed, and others, is absurd. It doesn't exist. What we really have today is corporate profit-price inflation. And that is the major domestic source of inflation.

What corporations are doing to increase their profits, their net profits, their profits over their costs, using inflation as an excuse, as a cover, to get away with doing this.

Abigail Disney:

So, what's a windfall tax? I've been hearing you talk about that. What is a windfall tax, and what is the likelihood of something like that happening in this country?

Robert Reich:

What it is, essentially, Abby is an attempt to tax these gains that are exploitative, that have nothing to do with either costs or what a corporation should normally register as profits.

What you do very simply is you take a bunch of years, it doesn't matter what the years are, but you take a set of years. Let's say, for example, 2005 to 2015, you look at the typical profits of a corporation during that period of time, and then that's your baseline.

And you say, "All right, over the last two years, during this period of extraordinary profitability leading to and contributing to inflation, well anything above that baseline, we're gonna tax, maybe 25% of it, or 50% of it, or more."

This is what European countries are doing with oil companies. It's what even the conservative government in Britain has done with the oil companies. There's no reason we shouldn't be doing it, at least, at least with oil companies.

Abigail Disney:

It seems to me that margins are a pretty easy thing to define, and when they rise during an inflationary period, that constitutes gouging, it should be defined as gouging, because you're hitting people when they're most vulnerable.

Robert Reich:

Of course you are. And my other worry there is that the Federal Reserve Board, by raising interest rates and bringing on the likelihood of recession, is hurting people who are the most vulnerable.

Abigail Disney: Well, and when you watch the news at night or, you know, read the front page of the newspaper, pretty much the only thing we hear about in terms of addressing inflation is unemployment has to go up to 7.5%, or 6 million more jobs lost for inflation to start coming down.

It seems to me that we're captive to some received wisdom.

Robert Reich: Absolutely

Abigail Disney: Why is inflation still so tied to interest rates and unemployment when unemployment is a word for suffering?

Robert Reich: Well, I think that you asked a terribly important question, and it really goes to how Americans have come to understand economics. The media is very important. Now, some of the media, like Fox News, is obviously captive to the Republican party. But even the major media, either explicitly wittingly or unwittingly captive to major corporations and financial centers in New York.

And I find myself, almost every day, angry, depressed, sort of outraged, because these old ways of seeing the economy, which maybe had some basis in reality 40 or 50 years ago, have none today. They are basically fictional views.

They leave out the most important aspects of the economy, particularly who wins, who loses. Why the rich are getting richer. Why people who are in the middle class are feeling squeezed. Why the poor are in more desperate straits than ever before. Why are these issues marginalized when they're at the center of the economy?

Abigail Disney:

Yes, and ultimately, as we see more every day at the center of our political and social stability too, these things are completely connected.

How did the Fed and corporations, how did they get so powerful? I mean, they've always been powerful, but what changed in the last 50 years to give them what feels like the final say so.

Robert Reich:

Well, I think one thing that changed is that corporations have become steadily more powerful, both as monopolists, in terms of their markets, but also as political actors, polluting our politics with very, very large campaign contributions. And both of those, one in the

private sector and the other in our public sector, have led to the almost immobilization of many people because they don't know what's happening.

There's deep cynicism, and at the same time that cynicism is easily exploited. And we saw Donald Trump and many Republicans, and in fact the entire Republican Party, come along and exploit that cynicism by saying to people effectively, "You can't trust anybody. The game is rigged against you."

Well, it is rigged against you. But, then they say, the way to unrig it is to target Muslims or to target black people or people of color generally, or to put up walls around America. They come up with these highly charged, hateful, bigoted answers to a legitimate question.

And that legitimate question is how did the economy become so rigged and what can we do to unrig it?

It became rigged because big corporations and very rich people got huge political power through their campaign contributions. How to unrig it? Well, one way to unrig it is to get big money out of politics. There are ways of doing it, even though the Supreme Court has decreed that money is a form of free speech.

Well, I think it's really a testament, sadly, to the failure of the Democratic Party, as well, to make working people part of its coalition. The Democratic party has actually abandoned the working class over the past 40 years, leaving the Republican Party to fill the void.

And, of course, the Republican Party, because its backers are so rich, so powerful, so corporate, the Republican Party will step into the void rhetorically, and exploit people's angers and fears and worries, but will not actually provide anything for the working class.

Abigail Disney:

I'm so glad you said that because, I mean, here's something you said in your Substack: "Democrats in the US have failed to offer what should be the obvious alternative: A bottom-up economics that invests in the education and the health of the public, and the infrastructure connecting them."

So, first of all, why did the Democratic Party get so captured by the trickle- down narrative, the neoliberal, whatever you wanna call it? Why did that take hold so deeply in the Democratic party?

Robert Reich:

Well, I think you follow the money. I mean, I was in the Clinton administration. I was the Secretary of Labor. I could see the money coming in. And whenever I said anything about it, criticized it, worried about it openly, I was told, "Look, this is the way the game is played. Democrats sorta can't play the game with one hand tied behind their backs. If Republicans are getting all this money, we have to try to get the money as well."

Well, the trouble with that logic is that once the Democrats start drinking from the same trough as the Republicans, then the game is over. Now, having said that, let me just make sure that anybody listening understands that the Republican Party is still much more deeply dependent on the wealthy and big corporations than is the Democratic Party.

But it's only a matter of degree. It's not a matter of principle. There are many, many principled Democrats who are raising money, as much as they can, in small donations. But, the Democratic Party as a whole is still in the corporate game.

Abigail Disney:

Do you think that that view of economics is still in charge of the Democratic Party, or have you seen some shifting?

Robert Reich:

I wish I could say that I've seen some shifting, Abby.

I think President Biden has been very kind of genuine in his overtures to labor and his concerns about the working class. I think that comes from a place in him that is very deep and very authentic. But, even the president, even President Biden, is susceptible to the machinations, the power, that comes with corporate America.

Abigail Disney:

Right. Um, you talk about bottom-up economics.

Robert Reich:

When I talk about bottom up economics, I'm talking about making your people, including your poor and your working class, the center of your economic program, and giving those people two things that they desperately need. One is a safety net, including paid family leave and paid sick leave. And all of the other things that, it became very obvious, America doesn't have, during the pandemic relative to other advanced nations.

But the second thing that people need are investments in their opportunities, opportunities to get ahead: the education, job training, healthcare, which is, you know, how can you possibly be productive and do well in a society if your health is compromised?

I remember, when I was Secretary of Labor, I would go into grammar schools and high schools in poor areas of this country and look and see how many young people were squinting at a blackboard.

And it was obvious to me that they couldn't see. They had never been to an eye doctor. Nobody had been concerned about their health in terms of their eyes. Well, how do we expect young people to learn? How do we expect young people to actually have a fair chance?

The same thing goes with our system of taxation. You know, so many of our schools are dependent on local property taxes in order to finance the schools. And yet, as we segregate by income more and more in this country, those local property taxes really are very small and getting smaller for schools in poor communities, and that means, just logically, those children have a bigger problem, a bigger challenge in getting a good education.

Abigail Disney:

You know, I keep coming back to a moral analysis. And maybe that's just my, it's a structural thing with me. I kind of can't stop thinking that way and I get frustrated when I'm told that, "No, you have to put it in terms of - what's the benefit to someone of doing the right thing."

But I do think that when we were sold this trickle-down narrative, we were sold a whole bunch of presumptions that came with it: That value is always something you can measure,

it's a material thing. That we are all basically in it on our own. That this is an individualist society and therefore the wellbeing of the collective doesn't matter. That selfishness is a positive quality.

We got sold a package of things that replaced what I think was an American tendency toward optimism with a real shared cynicism. And it has so much to do with our current political environment. If you see it that way, the trickle-down narrative could only have ended in this particular economic arrangement we're living in.

But I feel like it could only also have ended in this very cynical political environment. Do you think that there's like a kind of parallel, moral degradation that came with the trickle-down narrative? Or am I just being ridiculous?

Robert Reich:

Well, you're not being ridiculous. In fact, I think you're being exactly correct.

You can't separate economics from morality. You know, it's interesting, that in the 18th century, when you had Adam Smith – Adam Smith, the so-called founder of certainly conservative economics – they all go around with their Adam Smith ties conservative economists.

Adam Smith himself, in the 18th century, didn't call himself an economist. He called himself a moral philosopher. Now why did he call himself a moral philosopher? Because he, again and again, in his writings, said that he was trying to seek a good society. What's the meaning of a good society? How do we achieve a good society?

And that's where we were coming out of the Second World War. When I was born in 1946, well, that was the same year that, a wonderful movie called *It's A Wonderful Life*, was released and *It's A Wonderful Life*, starring Jimmy Stewart was all about your community, what you gave to your community, how you had responsibilities to your community and your community had responsibilities back to you.

And the villain of that movie, played by Lionel Barrymore, Mr. Potter, was selfish. He was all about just getting more and more, acquiring more and more. He was acquisitive and individualistic and selfish. And the moral of that movie was the we is more important than the I.

Abigail Disney:

You know, I made a conscious decision in the film I made to name names. I named Bob Iger, because I felt that he was taking home so much money at a time when his workers were doing so poorly that to, sort of, hide behind politeness rather than call that out seemed to be missing something very important, which was that, as an individual person, as one human being on this earth, he actually could change the way things were arranged if he chose to do so, as an individual.

And so what I'm getting to is, I guess, I'm wondering, if these individuals in these positions had suddenly woke up one morning having just, you know, experienced the, *It's A Wonderful Life* thing, and decided to do things differently, how much could they change, do you think?

Robert Reich:

I think they could change a great deal, and I don't think it's a problem to name names. In

fact, I think it's a problem not to name names. We're talking, ultimately, about individual decisions about moral matters that effect us all.

And when you have so much money, so much asset in this country, now in the hands of so few people, you know, we're back to the Gilded Age of the 1880s and 1890s, you have got to name those individuals. Back then we called them the Robber Barons. We singled them out: John D. Rockefeller and William Vanderbilt, who said, "The public be damned."

The way we actually changed America's consciousness about the responsibilities of individuals, of rich individuals, to the country, and why it was important to change the structure of the economy, itself, was by naming names. We have to do that again.

Abigail Disney: We're talking about individuals, right? And, we were talking about individuals at the very top of these companies at the height of power. But more often than not, we're not those people. And there, there is a role for individuals to play, especially around the movement to get money out of politics. The money in politics empowering corporations is really the bottom line here. You know, is there a movement afoot? How big is it? What is it doing? How do we help it?

Robert Reich:

Yes, I call it the pro-democracy movement. How do we get big money out of politics? Even though the Supreme Court has decreed that corporations or people under the First Amendment and corporate donations to politicians should be protected by the First Amendment, there is still the possibility of, first of all, providing matching funds through government to small donors.

That is, if somebody donates \$100 to a candidate, the government would provide a matching \$100. That would encourage candidates to rely on small donors because of the government, essentially a government subsidy, and those small donors can be very effective.

Another very important reform is to get rid of dark money, so that there is transparency, so we know where every donation is coming from. A lot of big corporations don't want people to know that they are supporting these candidates, particular candidates, and so they hide behind these so-called social welfare organizations that don't have to disclose their donors.

Well, that can be changed by legislation. It should be changed by legislation. The Supreme Court has done nothing that makes that difficult to do. In fact, there have been bills before the Senate and before the House, to do both of the things that I just talked about.

Abigail Disney:

So who are the organizations that are working on that? If somebody wanted to go and be helpful, where would they go?

Robert Reich:

One organization, I've been, in fact, I was Chairman of the Board until quite recently, is called Common Cause. I think it's a terrific organization.

Another group is the Brennan Center. It's done terrific work in terms of helping people understand what's at stake and what needs to be done.

Abigail Disney:

Yeah. It seems like if a corporation wants to be treated as a person, it should have as many responsibilities as it has rights, right?

Robert Reich:

Well, I'll believe that a corporation's a person when Texas executes a corporation.

Abigail Disney:

Yeah. That's a great note to end it on.

Robert Reich:

But Abby, thank you for inviting me.

Abigail Disney:

Oh, thank you so much. You've been a pleasure to talk to. What a delight.

You can subscribe to Robert Reich's newsletter on Substack and you can find him, I'm not kidding, on nearly every social media platform out there. If you look up RB Reich on Linktree.

If you want to see the American Dream and Other Fairy Tales, it's available on Amazon and iTunes and Vudu. And we're hosting screenings across the country, so to find out if there's a screening near you, or to host a screening, visit AmericanDreamDoc.Com. That's AmericanDreamDoc.com.

If you happen to be in the Berkeley area on February 3rd, I'll be at the UC Berkeley Labor Center where Robert Reich is an advisory board member. We'll do a screening of the *The American Dream and Other Fairy Tales*, and then we'll follow it up with a Q&A featuring me and some student labor organizers. See you there!

You've been listening to All Ears with me, Abigail Disney. Our supervising producer is Alexis Pancrazi. Jake Frankenfield is our associate producer. Our engineer is Florence Barrau-Adams. Bob Golden composed our theme song. And our executive producer is Kathleen Hughes.

For Fork Office the All Ears team is Angie Wang, Dominique Bouchard, Phil Nuxoll, Codey Young, and Cathie Camacho.

Thoughts, questions, feedback? You can reach us at AbigailDisney.com/AllEars. Find us wherever you get your podcasts. Be sure to subscribe and spread the word!

Thanks for listening.