

## Ralph Nader Radio Hour Transcript 97

Steve Skrovan: From the KPFK Studios in Southern California. It's the Ralph Nader Radio Hour.

Steve Skrovan: Welcome to the Ralph Nader Radio Hour. My name is Steve Skrovan, with the man of the hour, Ralph Nader. Hello, Ralph!

Ralph Nader: Hello, Steve!

Steve Skrovan: Our erstwhile co-host, Ralph, David Feldman is not here today. He's off to New Hampshire with Triumph the Insult Comic Dog. He blew us off for a hand puppet, Ralph.

Ralph Nader: Oh, I can't believe he gave us up for Triumph. What a disgusting dog!

Steve Skrovan: Well, there you go. We're going to have a very good exchange today. We have a great show. On the show today we're going to be talking about revolution, one that is written on a typewriter. That will all become much clearer when we talk with Professor Richard Polt, author of the Typewriter Revolution. But, most of this show will be dedicated to breaking open and dissecting President Obama's last State of the Union address. Now, the original idea for the Ralph Nader Radio Hour occurred to us two years ago when David interviewed Ralph in anticipation of President Obama's State of the Union address of 2014.

After that interview on KPFK in Los Angeles, David and I turned to each other and we said, "Hey, we should do this every week," and Ralph foolishly agreed. So, it's only appropriate that here in Episode 97 we do that again. This time we're a bit after the fact which gives us the opportunity to have Ralph actually respond to the actual remarks. So, I want to format this as if we were sitting in the living room with Ralph, watching the speech, and we pause it to get Ralph's take on something the president said. So, we will set up and drop in pieces of the speech, Ralph would take it from there. Let's get right to it. And, we'll start with, in this State of the Union, the president took a more philosophical approach. His overall theme was not to outline specific proposals but to sketch out a broad vision of the future, although he did briefly tap dance over some specifics.

President Obama: But tonight, I want to go easy on the traditional list of proposals for the year ahead. Don't worry, I've got plenty, from helping students learn to write computer code to personalizing medical treatments for patients. And I will keep pushing for progress on the work that I believe still needs to be done.

Fixing a broken immigration system, protecting our kids from gun violence, equal pay for equal work, paid leave, raising the minimum wage—all these things still matter to hardworking families. They're still the right thing to do. And I won't let up until they get done.

Steve Skrovan: So, Ralph, what do you think of that?

Ralph Nader: These were important goals but they were treated as throwaway lines, indicating to the Republicans in Congress and the Democrats that he had no priority among them, and he wasn't going to really put muscle behind one or the other. I think he would have done better if he paused, for example, since 70-80% of the American people want higher minimum wage for 30 million workers who are making less today in inflation adjusted wages than workers made in 1968, if you can believe it. He should have highlighted that by way of saying, "Look, I'm going to really put muscle, I'm going to go around the country and I'm going to really get this done and it means tens of billions of dollars for low-income families and a real stimulus for the economy in terms of increased consumer spending." So, by just making a list, he diluted them all, and he didn't signify any real seriousness on any one of them.

Steve Skrovan: So, you think that there is kind of a speech under the speech. There's a speech that we all hear on television, and then there are signals that go out like dog whistle things to the people actually sitting in the room.

Ralph Nader: Yeah, like people who have a priority for one or the other on the list like equal pay for equal work, paid leave. They hear that and they say, "Oh, that's good. He mentioned my issue or our issue." But, words are not deeds and a president even in a State of the Union speech, where he can't put everything in one hour, has got to be able to highlight some that he really wants to get through, translating words into deeds. He didn't do that in that section that you played.

Steve Skrovan: All right. Very good. Interesting. So, let's move on to the next thing a little bit later in the speech. The president talked about how the American economy is strong but is undergoing profound changes. And he went on to talk about the influence of technology.

President Obama: Today, technology doesn't just replace jobs on the assembly line, but any job where work can be automated. Companies in a global economy can locate anywhere, and they face tougher competition. As a result, workers have less leverage for a raise. Companies have less loyalty to their communities and more and more wealth and income is concentrated at the very top.

Steve Skrovan: So, what do you make of that - highlighting technology?

Ralph Nader: That's all very true yet you know, hearing him say all these true things which are undermining millions of jobs in our country invites the response, "Well, what does he want to do about it?" And, he didn't say other than to underline exactly the bad conditions that he's talking about by supporting the Trans-Pacific Partnership, the "trade agreement uber alles" that undermines our consumer, environmental and labor conditions in our own country, by subordinating them to the supremacy of international commerce and global corporations.

So, you see, you can't simply lay out this horrible scenario of automation and flight of industry from the US and workers having less leverage for a raise and then proceed to support an international trade agreement that makes things worse by his own description of how bad they are already. The other thing when he said as a result, workers have less leverage for a raise, well, he promised a card check for workers to more easily form unions in places like Walmart or Burger King or Target or other big box stores in 2008 but he didn't do anything. He didn't talk about it. He didn't propose it to Congress. So, why doesn't he say, "Well, we're going to give leverage to workers to form unions so they can at least defend what they have now and protect their benefits and increase the prospects for a long overdue raise."

Steve Skrovan: Now, last week - my wife and I belong to a speaker series - and we heard Henry Paulson speak, Henry Paulson who was Treasury secretary in the latter Bush years and used to be the head of Goldman Sachs. And, he professes a concern acknowledging income inequality but he too identified technology as the main culprit, when they asked him about income inequality. He said technology is eliminating jobs.

Ralph Nader: Well, the corporate executives are very sensitive about what technology is coming to automate jobs and unemploy workers. They talk about it privately in their clubs all the time, because they see it coming, they don't see anything stopping it. There's a study recently that says in the next ten years, one out of every five jobs is going to be replaced by robotics and automated processes. But, here is Henry Paulson, who became Secretary of Treasury just before he and Mr. Bush and Mr. Bernanke constructed the huge bailout of Wall Street. And, after they bailed out Wall Street - that is the crooks and speculators - Wall Street was bailed out with taxpayer money, not the workers, not the pension holders, not the people who suffered down the line - they didn't directly bail them out - the homeowners. And, he was quoted in a page one story, Steve, in the Washington Post, a remarkable admission. He said, "I didn't have the authority to do what I did, but someone had to do it."

Steve Skrovan: Yeah.

Ralph Nader: In other words, he admitted that he had no legal authority for the bailout. And, there was no single law professor that I heard of that took him to task for this. This is an unbelievable admission by the Secretary of Treasury, former head of Goldman Sachs who left Goldman Sachs with a 600 million dollar reserve for his labors there.

Steve Skrovan: So, I guess he's saying the crisis was so dire and needed such immediate attention, nobody seems to call him on that because he claims, and everybody claims that they saved the worldwide financial markets.

Ralph Nader: Sure. But, when he went to Congress for approval of the bailout, he should asked them for authority because they did give him approval after the House rejected and then was pressured to reconsider and then the Senate went along. Why didn't he ask it? Because he knew he wouldn't get that kind of legal authority, but he would get support from Congress to do whatever he thought was necessary on his own.

Steve Skrovan: And so, you don't think it wasn't a... He probably said it was a time issue. We had to act now. He didn't have time to go through all those processes.

Ralph Nader: You don't act illegally when you involve the taxpayer with hundreds of billions of dollars of bailout. I think what happened was that they predicted their own stampede, that the Bush administration wanted it to go through Congress so fast that they said "Hurry, hurry! Everything is going to collapse!" Well, everything didn't have to collapse. There were all kinds of emergency measures that the White House has to prevent that kind of collapse in the entire economy. They were talking about their buddies in Wall Street collapsing, that there was no speed bump so to speak that could be established. I mean, after all, Franklin Delano Roosevelt declared a bank holiday, and the banks were shut down in order to avoid this kind of ricochet throughout the economy.

Steve Skrovan: Right. Well, let's get back to the State of the Union. In this next section, the president addressed the cost of higher education.

President Obama: We've already reduced student loan payments to 10% of a borrower's income, and that's good. But now, we've actually got to cut the cost of college. Providing two years of community college at no cost for every responsible student is one of the best ways to do that, and I'm going to keep fighting to get that started this year. It's the right thing to do.

Steve Skrovan: What do you think of that, Ralph?

Ralph Nader: Well, it's good that he is pushing for a tuition-free community college. The tuition in community college is much less than in four-year colleges, obviously, and graduate school. In fact, some of the courses have a tuition bill that's less than the cost of the textbook for that course. Like textbooks will cost \$100-150 and the tuition cost is less than that, so that's good. But,

what impressed me about his comment is that the student loan payments to 10% were not retroactive. And so, you have over a trillion dollars of student loans in the US on students. Where in countries in Western Europe and elsewhere, they don't even have that, because the tuition is free for college like in Germany and France. But, when you have that kind of burden - and that's greater than the credit card debt - the student loan debt. That's greater than the credit card debt. Imagine that! You've got to do something for the existing debt not just the prospective debt.

Steve Skrovan: So, why do you think they don't want to go back and forgive the previous debt?

Ralph Nader: They're not willing to pay for it by assessing the Wall Street speculation tax. I wrote a column in my weekly column some months ago saying that Wall Street collapsed the economy, especially on the backs of the people in their 20s and early 30s, the young generation. They collapsed on their back, and they have a moral duty to deal with student debt and technical training for the youngsters, who didn't go to college as a sort of moral reparations for their speculation and their crimes that unemployed eight million workers and led to the massive recession from which we're still only partially recovering. And, Mr. Obama has never supported a Wall Street speculation tax the way Senator Elizabeth Warren and others in the Senate have.

Steve Skrovan: Well, Bernie Sanders has made that one of the planks in his platform. What is your take on people beginning to accept this idea? What will it take for them to accept the idea of a transaction tax?

Ralph Nader: Well, I think Bernie Sanders is on the right track on that. He's got to throw it at Hillary Clinton in the remaining debates much more forcefully, because she'll never come out for a real speculation tax. She'll say something vague as she has, but she won't put a dollar figure on it. And, there are studies that do put a dollar figure, depending on if it's one-half of one percent as a sales tax - which is what it is on stocks, bonds and derivatives, huge volumes, you know, trillions of dollars of turnover volumes in these transactions every year - or whether it's one-tenth of one percent. Professor Robert Pollin, for example, of the University of Massachusetts-Amherst has got all this figured out in terms of what the level of revenue from each different category of tax.

And, that's what he's got to do during the debate, Bernie Sanders. He's got to get very specific with her, because he's already told the public that she is indebted to Goldman Sachs and to Wall Street and to the huge lecture fees and to covering up for Wall Street crimes when she was a senator in the US Senate. He didn't quite use that latter phrase. Now, he's got to go to the next stage, which is the Wall Street speculation tax - which by the way we had in the Civil War to help pay for the Civil War we had early in the 20<sup>th</sup>

century. Some countries in Western Europe and Japan have it. So, it's not like something out of the blue sky.

Steve Skrovan: So, what do you think Hillary Clinton would say if she was confronted with this idea of a speculation tax, if she was in a debate, in a public forum, had to present herself as progressive?

Ralph Nader: I have no idea what she would say if Bernie Sanders was specific, which is why I want Bernie Sanders to say it and challenge her.

Steve Skrovan: Do you think she might be stumped?

Ralph Nader: I think she'd try to blur it and evade it and talk about how she wants to regulate Wall Street. But she's never been for it and she never would come out for it, because that really tells a serious message that she doesn't want to convey to her pay masters on Wall Street.

Steve Skrovan: Very good. Okay. Just slightly later in the speech sort of coming off the theme of education, President Obama took a swipe at Congress in general. Roll that one, Jimmy.

President Obama: But a great education isn't all we need in this new economy. We also need benefits and protections that provide a basic measure of security. It's not too much of a stretch to say that some of the only people in America who are going to work the same job, in the same place, with a health and retirement package for 30 years are sitting in this chamber.

Steve Skrovan: That sounded like it was a little bit of a roast there because you hear laughter and then you hear "Whoa!"

Ralph Nader: That was one of his best lines in the State of the Union speech no doubt. But, it's like he had the hammer, but he didn't put it on the nail. And, what he should have done is added what he actually meant by a basic measure of security. Did he mean expanding Social Security the way Senator Bernie Sanders has been talking it up around the country? Did he mean tougher protections on private pensions from being looted as described in a number of books by corporate managers who control these pensions and very often loot them? Did he mean that he was going to provide a better form of unemployment compensation? He didn't have to go in any great detail, but it would have been nice just to have a sentence expressing what he meant by a basic measure of security, after he put the members of Congress properly on the defensive for the great measure of security, their great pensions, health insurance, life insurance, rent subsidies that they have provided for themselves but not for the American people.

Steve Skrovan: Right. He also touched on the business environment in America and he got applause from the Republican side believe it or not. Then they very quickly got quiet. So, roll that one in, Jimmy.

President Obama: I think there are outdated regulations that need to be changed. There is red tape that needs to be cut. There you go! Yes! But after years now of record corporate profits, working families won't get more opportunity or bigger paychecks just by letting big banks or big oil or hedge funds make their own rules at everybody else's expense.

Ralph Nader: Yes, I think, Steve, this is a message I've heard before in prior speeches by President Obama that there is red tape that needs to be cut, outdated regulations. Sure, there are a lot of outdated regulations. They're obsolete, even in the health and safety area. They've been far exceeded by existing production of these products. Like, for years, the tire standard of the Auto Safety Agency wasn't changed for over 40 years. And, what was he waiting for in 2009 when he became president? He should have had a commission established to upgrade outdated regulation and to delete regulations that were not only obsolete but of no use whatsoever.

And so, here he is in the last year of his presidency. He's dittoing his own statements that have never been followed up with action. The same is true about his cuffing the big banks or big oil and hedge funds. I don't remember him really making an issue out of something that a lot of economists and people like Warren Buffet and others would support: that is getting rid of the carried interest. That is getting rid of the income to the managers of these hedge funds being taxed at capital gains rates 15% or less instead of ordinary income. I mean, that was an easy one.

Steve Skrovan: Right.

Ralph Nader: And, it is true that he would have been opposed by Senator Schumer and then Senator Kerry who actually defended Wall Street on this and were chided by no less a rock-ribbed Republican, Senator Chuck Grassley from Iowa, who told me at a meeting when I raised the issue, he said, "What about your friends Chuck Schumer and John Kerry? They just left the committee room after opposing getting rid of carried interest which is costing the taxpayers billions of dollars?" So, we have that little history that needs to be a reaction to that segment of his speech.

Steve Skrovan: Now, you talked about outdated regulations but it seemed to me that the outdated has to do with they're not really tough enough. Is that what you were saying?

Ralph Nader: That's one category. Correct. A lot of the safety and health regulations are obsolete because they haven't kept up with new technology or they haven't kept up with new engineering studies that describe new hazards that have been expanded, for example. And, for example, the electronics risks in cars, sudden acceleration of Toyota, that whole scandal. The Auto Safety Standard just were not expanded to include that.

Steve Skrovan: But, what about the red tape type of regulations he was talking about? Is that real? Is that a myth? Does it just affect small business or big business? Is it really red tape?

Ralph Nader: A lot of it is due to corporate lawyers who keep wanting waivers, exceptions and regulations that horribly complicate these regulations. And they often are associated with new kinds of forms and new kinds of reporting. And, a lot of the right wing influence on the Office of Management and Budget attached to the White House trying to force these agencies to make sure that they can justify everything they do and the agencies turn around and say "Okay, we got to get information from those who we regulate." There really should be a major effort to redesign these forms. They are often obscure. They're complicated. You know, PhDs can't understand the directions. And that's not just in the tax area. It's in the pension area. It's in many, many other areas - contracting areas - and there's no reason for it. The president should have taken a big lead on this, because almost everybody would support him.

Steve Skrovan: So, you're saying the regulations started simple but then were complicated by corporate lobbyists trying to get exceptions for their particular slice of business.

Ralph Nader: Oh, yeah. Definitely. And, those exceptions often lead to hundreds and hundreds of pages of elaborated regulations.

Steve Skrovan: And so, you could say to the Republicans, "You've got yourself to blame for complicating them."

Ralph Nader: Yes. I think the Republicans bear a big burden here because even when they were in office and they controlled the presidency, they didn't do anything about it other than talk. And I think this was a section of President Obama's speech where he could have raised the IRS budget being cut and cut, cut by the Republicans like an act of vengeance, so that they can't begin to collect - listen to this, listeners - 300 billion dollars of evaded taxes every year, with a B. That means you pay more or you get less service, or there's more deficit, or all three. And, he should have raised that and defended the IRS, which is now down to 10.8 billion dollars to raise 90% of the multi-trillion dollar federal budget. And, that's one reason why they can't get back to you on the phone when you are asking for directions. They simply are overwhelmed. The budget is much lower than it was in 1979, before all these new requirements including ObamaCare came in on IRS to administer.

Steve Skrovan: For his most ambitious vision of the future, President Obama quoted Vice President Biden who said that with the new moonshot, America can cure cancer. Listen to this.

President Obama: Tonight, I'm announcing a new national effort to get it done. And because he's gone to the mat for all of us on so many issues over the past 40 years, I'm putting Joe in charge of Mission Control. For the loved ones we've all lost, for the families that we can still save, let's make America the country that cures cancer once and for all.

Ralph Nader: I must say that was a cheap shot on a very serious issue, and that is reducing cancer. First of all, Nixon said the same thing years ago, get rid of cancer in ten years. It's just an easy line. It's not controversial. Who's against it? But, there's no meat on those bones. He's not announcing any details as far as I'm concerned, and he's got poor Joe Biden running all over the world, and he's got a year left. It's hard to see how he's going to be in charge of what Mr. Obama calls "Mission Control." It was just an applause paragraph. And he got what he asked for, applause.

Steve Skrovan: And, I heard a report that somebody read Joe Biden's lips when he turned to Paul Ryan and said, "This is the first I've heard of this." So, that sounds like he sprung it on Joe.

Ralph Nader: That's truly a new definition of a throwaway paragraph.

Steve Skrovan: Yeah, very much. Well, we're going to keep quickly moving on. We got a lot to cover here. The president also spoke about the seriousness of addressing climate change in general and specifically doing this.

President Obama: That's why I'm going to push to change the way we manage our oil and coal resources, so that they better reflect the costs they impose on taxpayers and our planet. And that way, we put money back into those communities, and put tens of thousands of Americans to work building a 21<sup>st</sup> century transportation system

Ralph Nader: Well, I don't know quite what he meant by that. I mean, clearly, he should have said that in 2009 but he's now past his re-election, so he can say what he thought about what he's afraid to say publicly, which is that we have to phase out oil, gas and coal. And, he started that with a program on the federal lands where the oil, gas and coal companies have leases to exploit the minerals - and pay very little to the taxpayers for those leases by the way - especially coal leases. So, he's getting that underway and that's good. But, it wasn't quite clear what he meant by putting money back into communities and put tens of thousands of Americans to work building a 21<sup>st</sup> century transportation system.

Does he mean electric cars powered by renewable energy? What does he mean by that? Does he mean more public transit? I mean, that just took a few words to elaborate, otherwise it's just another attempted applause line. He might have mentioned a new book by David Freeman who was a consultant to many past presidents on energy and ran four giant utilities, the

Tennessee Valley Authority. He's just out with a new book called All America Electric, which is right on this point of Obama. One sentence on that and tens of thousands of people would have started reading that book from arguably the greatest practical and conceptual expert on energy - David Freeman, a lawyer and an engineer - in America today.

Steve Skrovan: Right. Right, who we've had on the show. We'll have back. I want to move now to the foreign policy. Some of the things we've talked about, but I want to single out this one particular quotation. When mentioning terrorist threats, the President seemed to echo your thoughts about how overheated rhetoric tends to play right into ISIS' hands. But then he said this:

President Obama: If this Congress is serious about winning this war, and wants to send a message to our troops and the world, authorize the use of military force against ISIL. Take a vote. Take a vote.

Ralph Nader: It's amazing what presidents think they can get away with. I mean, what is he saying? He's saying authorize the use of military force against ISIL. Well, if they don't authorize it, why is he in effect acting unconstitutionally or illegally? He just came out in other part of his speech for the rule of law. But it's amazing. Here he is going after ISIS and then admitting that he doesn't have authority from the Congress. Our founding fathers would have thought that was a clear and impeachable offense.

Steve Skrovan: Well yes, so what is he asking for? Because he's already doing it.

Ralph Nader: Yeah. He's asking for an endorsement. Remember, he called it a war against ISIS. If it is, then it should be a formal declaration of war, because they do control territory in Syria and Iraq.

Steve Skrovan: Right.

Ralph Nader: But, he didn't want to use that phrase, because he doesn't want Congress ever to be burdened by obeying their own Constitution, their oath of office and saying to the President, "Unless we declare war on Libya, for example, you're not making a move."

Steve Skrovan: Right. He talked about building global coalitions to help solve the conflict in Syria and how it has worked to negotiate the Iran nuclear deal and to fight the spread of Ebola in West Africa. And, we've talked about this a lot on the show - and you actually even talked about it a little bit earlier in this program - he also said that a global coalition did one more thing:

President Obama: That's how we forged a Trans-Pacific Partnership to open markets, and protect workers and the environment, and advance American leadership in Asia. It cuts 18,000 taxes on products made in America, which will then support more good jobs here in America. With TPP, China does not set the rules in that region; we do. You want to show our strength in this new

century? Approve this agreement. Give us the tools to enforce it. It's the right thing to do.

Steve Skrovan: Ralph, we've debunked a lot of what he said here already. Talk to me now about this, you know, how he said this as a strategic move on his part. How is he trying to sell this? He talks about 18,000 tax cuts and he talks about China and making the rules. Since this has taken so much heat, he is now trying to save it.

Ralph Nader: Well, he is using the wrong words deliberately. First of all, it's not a partnership, Trans-Pacific Partnership. It's a treaty. He doesn't want to use the word "treaty," because that requires two-thirds ratification by the US Senate, instead of majority vote, which is what an agreement apparently calls for. But, it is a treaty. All the rest of the world calls it a treaty. Second, he talks about it cuts 18,000 taxes on products made in America. It's not "taxes" technically. It's "tariffs" - that our exports would not be subject to as many "tariffs." But, it's a bad deal because these are the same multinational corporations that lobbied the US government in past years to get NAFTA, the World Trade Organization, the Korean-US Trade Treaty, all of which have demonstrated in study after study cost Americans far more jobs than they got Americans - not to mention freezing consumer, environmental and worker proposals, because they would be considered non-tariff trade barriers and therefore subject to reversal by secret tribunals in Geneva, Switzerland. More details on that, listeners, just go to [tradewatch.org](http://tradewatch.org). You'll get all the examples you need. [Tradewatch.org](http://Tradewatch.org).

The other aspect of it, Steve: he said with the Trans-Pacific Partnership - as he calls it - China doesn't set the rules in the region, we do. No, no, Mr. Obama. You're allowing the corporations to set the rules in that region, and they favor China over the US because they can get away with more cheaper labor and more pollution than they can get in this country. And, that includes US global corporations. And, by the way, China has bilateral agreements with some of these Asian countries, which set rules as well. So, it's a very misleading paragraph, almost to the point of being shameless.

Steve Skrovan: And, it seems to me that they are trying to position this as something of a national security issue - that we're competing with China - when we both know that the United States and China are just inextricably linked economically.

Ralph Nader: That's a good point. And, Hillary Clinton gives the Trans-Pacific Partnership - Because she switched under the critique of Bernie Sanders recently. She was all for the TPP as Secretary of State - and she always tried to give it a national security dimension, figuring you know, it's harder to oppose something that is for our national security. It's basically for the security of unpatriotic global US corporations like Boeing, General Electric, Citi Group, Pfizer and other corporations that were born in the US, rose to

profit on the backs of American workers, bailed out by US taxpayers when they got in trouble. And, what's their response to America? Is it gratitude? No! It's, "We're out of here, out of your jobs, out of your industry! We're heading for these countries," which by the way happen to be repressive dictatorships where they can keep the workers over there in their place at 75 cents an hour with no benefits and no protections.

Steve Skrovan: Right. So, moving on. We've got a few more here to get through, and in a not so veiled swipe at the Republicans running for office this year, he invoked Pope Francis and talked about religious intolerance.

President Obama: When politicians insult Muslims, whether abroad or our fellow citizens, when a mosque is vandalized, or a kid is called names, that doesn't make us safer. That's not telling it like it is. It's just wrong. It diminishes us in the eyes of the world. It makes it harder to achieve our goals. It betrays who we are as a country.

Ralph Nader: That was very well said. And, in fact, there were a lot of affirmations of good values in his speech, and that was a particularly pointed one, and it needed to be said and he said it in an unqualified manner. Unfortunately, his drones and other military ventures are killing a lot of innocent Muslims in more than a few countries before, while, and after he made that excellent statement.

Steve Skrovan: He also spoke about the importance of trust in the political process.

President Obama: But democracy does require basic bonds of trust between its citizens. It doesn't work if we think the people who disagree with us are all motivated by malice. It doesn't work if we think that our political opponents are unpatriotic or trying to weaken America. Democracy grinds to a halt without a willingness to compromise, or when even basic facts are contested, or when we listen only to those who agree with us.

Steve Skrovan: What would you say to that, Ralph?

Ralph Nader: I wish he'd practice what he preaches. What he preaches is pretty good, and that was a pretty good segment. But, I personally know that he doesn't like to respond to people he disagrees with. I've sent him dozens of letters to the White House and put them along with my letters to George W. Bush in my book, Return to Sender, that just came out a few months ago.

Steve Skrovan: Good plug. Good plug.

Ralph Nader: Yeah. The amazing thing about my letters to him - which were all pretty substantive. And they weren't exactly redundant. They held him to higher expectations in deeds as well as words. They alerted him to situations in the executive branch around the country he may not have been aware of. They proposed constructive solutions. They offered good audiences such

as the non-profit sector for him to speak to - He not only didn't answer any of them. He never had his staff even acknowledge their receipt, which the Prime Minister of Canada does routinely to letters that agree or disagree with his policies. So, I must say this is a case where he does not practice what he preaches and he has a lot of staff and a lot of volunteers, especially the latter, who go to the White House every day to work on answering letters. But, they like to answer letters that have symbolic value for them or they can use as props at State of the Union gatherings.

Steve Skrovan: The president also mentioned a few regrets.

President Obama: It's one of the few regrets of my presidency—that the rancor and suspicion between the parties has gotten worse instead of better.

Steve Skrovan: Is there a solution to that, Ralph?

Ralph Nader: If that's one of his few regrets, I wonder what his non-regrets are. I mean, one would think that some of his regrets would be that he didn't fulfill his campaign promises of 2008 for a higher minimum wage, for revising NAFTA and World Trade Organization agreements, for getting big money out of politics, for holding the fat cats of Wall Street accountable, and for pulling back on empire. He did pull back out of Iraq but not in a very clever way, and he's now getting back in step by step, and he's still stuck in Afghanistan. And, he used to talk about the complexity and nightmare of the tax system, and didn't even protect the IRS budget, much less propose and follow up on tax reform. So, when I hear him say one of the few regrets of his presidency is vituperative exchanges between political opponents, I wonder what his sense of gravity is all about.

Steve Skrovan: So, beyond trust...and you just mentioned influence of money in politics. He touched on that too. He spoke about reforming the system itself.

President Obama: I believe we've got to reduce the influence of money in our politics, so that a handful of families or hidden interests can't bankroll our elections. And if our existing approach to campaign finance reform can't pass muster in the courts, we need to work together to find a real solution—because it's a problem. And most of you don't like raising money. I know. I've done it

Ralph Nader: Well, describe a little follow-up on that. First of all, one gets a sense of déjà vu, Shakespeare's famous phrase, "Words, words, words." He said this in 2008. He said this in 2009. He said it in 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014. We, as citizens are entitled to a little actionable follow-up. And, what's really remarkable about this, Steve, is that he has gone to 500 -give or take - fundraisers all over the country. Just think of this—getting in Air Force One, going to California, going to Seattle, going to New York. That takes up the better part of a day. And, he's going to fundraisers not from small contributors, the way Bernie Sanders is raising funds at a record pace.

He is going to the very fat cats who want something in return. He's going to the Boeing people. He's going to the drug company people. He's going to the Wall Street people. He's doing the opposite of what he said year after year should be done, which is to reform the campaign finance system. About 500 fundraisers. And he expects to do even more in his last year in office to help the Democratic Party. Well, that's not real leadership. And that is why we talk about politicians with forked tongues. Say one thing, do the opposite.

Steve Skrovan: Right. Well, as he concluded, he also hit hard on another thing that seems to reflect your thinking, Ralph.

President Obama: I need every American to stay active in our public life and not just during election time so that our public life reflects the goodness and the decency that I see in the American people every single day.

Steve Skrovan: Is that true, Ralph? Would that reflect your thinking?

Ralph Nader: It does in a more concrete way, which is the following: He had no empowerment agenda for the American people. He had no answer to the question, "Mr. President, if you're going to use your powers, how are you going to shift powers from the few to the many, from big business to working people, from big vendors to consumers, from big corporate welfare programs under corporate lobbying in Congress to the taxpayers who have been stripped of any power, from the big corporate managers to their shareholders, whom they've stripped power from and have left powerless?" He has no answer to that.

And, I sent him a letter once in the middle of the campaign in 2012 saying, "Why don't you go down to a hotel ballroom right near the White House and address a thousand leaders that we could bring together - citizen groups from all over the country with millions of members? That's the National Council of Churches, labor groups, consumer and environmental groups, charities, advocacy groups, the way Jimmy Carter did years ago. I said that would be a good way for you to convey the importance for "Americans..." to use your words, "...to stay active in our public life and not just during election time." And, he never answered. So I sent a copy to Michelle Obama, and she wrote back saying, "Thank you very much for the invitation, but he's too busy." He's too busy. He goes all over the world pushing motorcycles for Harley Davidson and sales of Boeing planes and photo opportunities at factories, and he wouldn't go down the street to address a ballroom full of leaders of membership organizations that... many of whom support him from all over the country. Again, he's not practicing what he preaches.

Steve Skrovan: It's a rhetorical, philosophical point of view that in your view is not backed up by specific action.

Ralph Nader: Yes. Well, you know, most politicians operate on rhetoric. They don't want their record to be upfront for examination by the people or by the media. They want rhetoric, and the media falls for it almost every time. They'll go with the rhetoric and not say "You know, your rhetoric doesn't measure up to your record, Mr. Politician, Ms. Politician." Too bad. That's what we've got to do as citizens. We got to put the record there and just basically say, "This is the way we're going to measure you, not by what you say on the stumping grounds of political campaigning before arranged audiences."

Steve Skrovan: Well, thank you, Ralph. That concludes our breakdown of the State of the Union address.

Steve Skrovan: Now, as most of you know, over the course of the last 50 years, Ralph has written a lot of books. I mean, *a lot* of books, and probably thousands of columns. What you may not realize is that every single one of those books and columns have been written on a typewriter. Well, apparently, according to our next guest, Ralph is not behind the curve. He once again is ahead of the curve.

Dr. Richard Polt is a professor of Philosophy at Xavier University in Cincinnati, Ohio. His main interests are the metaphysical and ethical problems of Greek and German philosophy. He has taught elective courses on a variety of topics including Plato, Aristotle, Kant, German idealism, existentialism, slavery, time, and Heidegger. But, today, he is here to talk to us about one of Ralph's great loves, typewriters. Welcome to the Ralph Nader Radio Hour, Dr. Richard Polt.

Richard Polt: Thank you very much!

Ralph Nader: Indeed this is a delight. I have five Underwood standard typewriters. I only use a standard typewriter. One of my favorites years ago was the Smith-Corona Skywriter. What a durable typewriter that was. That was first sold in 1949. I typed a lot of senior theses for Princeton seniors in the '50s in order to pay for some of my expenses. So, it's a delight to see that someone has written a book - Richard Polt to be exact, a professor - called The Typewriter Revolution: A Typist's Companion for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. And, it sort of reminds me of neckties, you know. Never throw away a necktie. You get a broad necktie, a narrow necktie, it goes into fashion. But if you hold it long enough, all neckties will come back into fashion. And now, what you're saying, Professor Polt is that typewriters are coming back into fashion. Why?

Richard Polt: It's true. Well, it's a sort of full circle, except they don't mean what they used to mean, right? Because they still do the same thing mechanically, but the world has changed around them. So now, I think the meaning has

changed quite a bit. Now, “typewriter user” is like you - a sort of rebel, an individualist. And they are also perceived as something personal and even romantic sometimes or sentimental. People like to write poetry on them. And, they’re an alternative to the standard, which is now of course to do things digitally.

Ralph Nader: You know, you have a wonderful statement, which basically is titled “Ten Non-Hipster Reasons to Use a Typewriter Instead of a Laptop.” And, before we get into that, you claim that you’re one of the experts consulted about the fake George W. Bush typewritten documents that fooled *60 Minutes*. Could you explain that?

Richard Polt: Yeah. You might recall that this is the scandal that eventually brought down Dan Rather, unfortunately. But, *60 Minutes* ran a story during the 2004 election that questioned the legitimacy of President Bush’s military service. And they produced these documents supposedly written in the early ‘70s by his superior. When I first looked at them, my initial reaction was immediately, “Well, that was done with a word processor.” And, a lot of people had the same reaction. It turned out to be a little bit more complicated, because in the early ‘70s, you did have some various sophisticated typewriters that could do differential spacing so that not every letter takes up the same width and so on. So it got quite technical. But, when all is said and done, I have no doubt at all that that was made with Times New Roman font on a computer.

Ralph Nader: Yes. And, it was unfortunate because the essence of Dan Rather’s report - that George Bush received preferential treatment when he joined the Air Force reserve which was not about to head for Vietnam and was stationed in the South - was true. It was an accurate story. But, it had that side to it that was unfortunately you just described. I want to go through just a few of the reasons for using a typewriter instead of a laptop. And, I want to say that one of the reasons I use a typewriter is that I don’t like to write a lot of drafts. And when you use a typewriter, you have to erase; and I don’t like to erase. So, it imposes a discipline on me to have my first draft as close to my final draft as possible, whereas when you’re on a computer, you can so easily change things and rearrange things that early drafts may be sloppier than they would otherwise be. Also, when the lights go out, computers shut down. We’re still working. Right, Professor Polt?

Richard Polt: That’s right. That’s really satisfying.

Ralph Nader: Okay. One reason you give. Sustainability. Briefly, what do you mean by that?

Richard Polt: Well, if you look at how our digital devices are produced and how long they last, they are made in these factories, which often do have some questionable environmental and labor practices. And then they’re obsolete

within a couple of years. You know, a five-year-old computer or smartphone is a piece of junk. And, what happens to that junk? Well, it turns into waste and it's actually treated in a very hazardous way. And, along the way, of course, it sucks up a lot of electricity. So, I'm not a teetotaler about digital devices at all; but they're certainly not the green machines that people pretend they are. Whereas, the typewriter was made a long time ago, and if it's a manual, it's not going to use any new electricity. It doesn't have to waste paper. There's a lot of unused or recycled paper that you can just pick up. So, it's really good for the planet I think.

Ralph Nader: And, the second reason you give, focus. You say focus. A typewriter was made to do one thing, type. Explain that.

Richard Polt: Well, this is really important one for me because I do teach Philosophy. And Philosophy, you do have to think through an idea; and often the going gets tough intellectually. And, if I'm on a computer, my temptation is to say, "Oh, I'll just check my e-mail, or I'll check EBay and maybe buy a new, new typewriter." Right? But, if I'm just at the typewriter, it's waiting for me to do one thing, which is work through an idea. And that's why I like to brainstorm at the typewriter and just see where it takes me. So, it's very good for sustaining attention just on the task of writing.

Ralph Nader: Whereas in a computer, there are so many distractions. You can even take off and play a video game or something or shop for something.

Richard Polt: Sure.

Ralph Nader: So, that's what you mean by focus with a manual regular typewriter. Another point you make is privacy, comparing computers with typewriters. Explain that.

Richard Polt: Well, we've made a lot of compromises, haven't we? And, I think we're realizing this and thanks to the efforts of Edward Snowden for instance, we know that anything you do digitally either is or it can be automatically collected and analyzed by the government or corporations or hackers. And, even if they don't end up using your data - and in most cases they won't do anything with it - but you know, it still creates this sense that somebody is looking over your shoulder. And I don't think it's good for your consciousness. So, I like to do things, but I'm just going to do them - and not in order to seem a certain way to somebody. So, if you really want to be private, I would never put anything really intimate in e-mail. And something typewritten - or for that matter handwritten letter - is still the best way.

Ralph Nader: And, you point out, "It's no wonder that top secret agencies from the Kremlin to MI6 rely on typewriters today." The next one would make

Ralph Waldo Emerson very happy. Self-reliance. Compare typewriters with computers.

Richard Polt: Yes. Well, I can understand my typewriter. It took me a while because I'm not a mechanically gifted person really. But, when I got a little bit braver and started taking typewriters apart and thinking about them, I found that yes, I can understand exactly how this works; and I can fix it and keep it running for decades, whereas you really have to be a very specialized expert to understand all the hardware and software in one of the devices that we use every day.

Ralph Nader: Not to mention the fine print contracts you mentioned.

Richard Polt: Oh, yes, absolutely. So, we sign these agreements every few days to get updated and how many of us actually read them?

Ralph Nader: Another one deals with correspondence. I love this one. Explain correspondence: typewriters compared to digital communication.

Richard Polt: Well, again, I'm not a teetotaler, so I use Facebook to a limited extent. There is actually a typewriter lovers group on Facebook, which is a lot of fun. You can exchange information and pictures and so on. But, are those people really my friends? Well, in some cases I've met them and they are. And in others, they are basically just names to me. So, as I say, we've never had more "friends" but a real friend is hard to find. And, a very nice thing to do to a real friend is send them a unique letter that you've typed on your typewriter and they will be just delighted before they even read the letter, because they know that you went to some trouble.

Ralph Nader: For more lore on typewriters, this wonderful book that Professor Polt that's just put out - 382 pages - called The Typewriter Revolution: A Typist's Companion for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. It's attracting young people who are turning off the digital world and getting back to something they can feel and control and not have their privacy invaded and on and on. You give a lot of reasons. But, I have two quick questions. One is a criticism of your book. And it's not you, it's the designer. Because when I'm leafing through your book, the type is very tiny and the type is very light except for the bold face paragraphs and quotes. How did you allow that to happen? I mean, someone as sensitive, as philosophical as you, Professor Polt will basically tell people, elderly people in particular, "Get ready to squint if you want to enjoy my book."

Richard Polt: Well, I'm sorry to hear that. I have had one other complaint but just one. I don't find it difficult to read myself, but they did the Sans Serif font. And for some people, the fonts with serifs, I think, regardless of size - they're just easier on the eyes.

Ralph Nader: What's interesting is the pages are not as clearly written as a typewriter with a modestly new ribbon.

Richard Polt: Well, I'm sorry to hear that that's your experience of it.

Ralph Nader: Okay. Well, maybe in the next edition you can get together with your designer. By the way, this is a very common situation with designers of published material now. In order to highlight the little quotes in the pages with dark type, they go to the opposite and produce very light type for the bulk of the words on the page. And, it's not just a criticism of your designer. It's true all over at the present time where art interferes with function. Now, here is a practical question of some of our listeners who use typewriters or want to use typewriters: What about getting a) ribbons, b) repair services, and c) carbon paper? Are they available other than online? I know you mention it in your book.

Steve Skrovan: Antique shops maybe, Ralph? Could they be in antique shops?

Ralph Nader: Yeah. I just bought my latest typewriter from an antique shop, but other than trying to get these online, are there repair shops reasonably scattered around the country?

Richard Polt: Well, they're scattered, but they do exist. Unfortunately, if you don't want to use any online information it becomes more difficult. I do have a website called The Classic Typewriter Page, where I have an updated list of repairmen - they're usually men - around the world. And I have about 200 people in the US. So, more than you might think. Some of them still have typewriter shops that only do typewriters. It's a very traditional model; and there are just a few left. Others have branched out into other office machines. And others are retired and working from their garage, but they're out there. And ribbon can often be found at your local Staples or and of course online. And, I think carbon paper can also still be located, so these supplies are not impossible to find at all.

Ralph Nader: Anybody under 30, you say carbon paper, they say, "What?"

Richard Polt: Yeah, that is really kind of antique.

Ralph Nader: Yes, Steve, Steve as you were saying?

Steve Skrovan: I was going to say it's delightful hearing both of you geek out over typewriters here. I happen to know that there's a celebrity - I don't know if you know about this, Doctor - that Tom Hanks is a big typewriter aficionado. Were you aware of that?

Richard Polt: I was. I've never gotten a chance to meet him and talk to him about it, unfortunately. But, he will write letters to people on his typewriter. He'll keep score at baseball games on his typewriter. And, I hear he's planning a

book of short stories that no doubt he's going to write on his collection of hundreds of typewriters.

Ralph Nader: I think you may have touched on an important point. When I send letters to people, they know it's on a typewriter, and they feel flattered. It's like, "Oh, he actually typed the letter to me!" And, I think you can get through to people more if you actually type a letter to them rather than do it digitally. What do you say about that?

Richard Polt: Oh, absolutely! It's very impressive because part of the message that typewriting sends today is that you took the trouble to do something in a way that's a little bit slower, a little bit harder, a little more individual and people appreciate that. Oh, another thing that comes to mind is another celebrity - who I recently discovered loves her typewriter - is Lady Gaga, the famous musician. She has been photographed composing lyrics on her Underwood portable.

Ralph Nader: Well, more people are going gaga over typewriters, Professor Polt.

Richard Polt: That's right.

Ralph Nader: And, you're book is going to help this. I can't even describe how delightful a book this is. It's got pictures of typewriters old and newer. It's got cartoons. It's got quotes from people. It's got so many things. You can just read it a little at a time, and you're in a completely different world than you're being invoked in the digital virtual reality world. So, it's a refreshing exploration. For those of you who are so modernistic that you poo-poo this, just think of it as you would think about exploring a cave. Call yourself a spelunking explorer of the world of typewriters. Thank you very much, Professor Polt.

Richard Polt: Thank you. And happy typing to you.

Ralph Nader: All the best to you.

Steve Skrovan: We've been speaking with Dr. Richard Polt, author of [The Typewriter Revolution](#). For more information, go to [typewriterrevolution.com](http://typewriterrevolution.com) or The Typewriter Revolution Facebook page. So, that's our show. A transcript of this episode will be posted on [ralphnaderradiohour.com](http://ralphnaderradiohour.com). For Ralph's weekly blog written on a typewriter, go to [nader.org](http://nader.org). For more from Russell Mokhiber, go to [corporatecrimereporter.com](http://corporatecrimereporter.com). Remember to visit the country's only law museum, The American Museum of Tort Law in Winsted, Connecticut. Go to [tortmuseum.org](http://tortmuseum.org). Join us next week when we talk Anti-Trust Law to Professor Carl Bogus and Washington Post columnist Kenneth Harney on credit scoring and home mortgages. Talk to you then, Ralph!

Ralph Nader:

Thanks very much, Steve! Thanks to the listeners. Spread the word. I am off to my clickety-clack typewriter to do my weekly column.