David Feldman: From the KPFK studios in Southern California it's the Ralph Nader Radio Hour. [Music]

Steve Skrovan: Welcome to the Ralph Nader Radio Hour. My name is Steve Skrovan along with my co-host David Feldman. Hello, David. How are you doing?

David Feldman: Very good. This is the best part of my week.

Steve Skrovan: And of course, here we are with the man of the hour, just back from a book tour in the Pacific Northwest, The Breaking Through Power book, we have Ralph Nader. Hello, Ralph?

Ralph Nader: Hello, we have an extraordinary subject today.

Steve Skrovan: Yes, we have another landmark show for you today that we are going to get to as quickly as possible. We're going to be spending the bulk of the program speaking with the legendary broadcast journalist, Ted Koppel. And at the end, Ralph is going to talk about his friend and colleague, the late Tom Hayden. But David, introduce our guest.

David Feldman: Over the course of twenty-six years as anchor and managing editor of the ABC News Program *Nightline* Ted Koppel became the longest serving and most honored news anchor in US broadcast history. After leaving ABC in 2005, Mr. Koppel produced twenty hours of documentaries for the Discovery network, where he served as managing editor. Since then, he's worked as a contributing analyst for BBC America and a special correspondent for the NBC News Magazine Program *Rock Center* A member of the Broadcasting Hall of Fame, Mr. Koppel has won every major broadcast award, including 42 Emmy's, 8 Peabodys, and 2 George Polk Awards. His most recent book is the New York Times Bestseller, Lights Out, which examines and evaluates potential ways for America to prepare for a cyber catastrophe. And as of February of this year, Mr. Koppel has been working for CBS news as senior contributor to the CBS Sunday Morning show. Welcome to the Ralph Nader Radio Hour, Ted Koppel.

Ted Koppel: Well, thank you. I appreciate that introduction. That sort of sums it all up.

Ralph Nader: Welcome indeed, Ted Koppel. I want to start by cautioning our listeners, who are known to be very serious and wanting to have solutions to problems that they hear described on this program, that the subject can be overwhelming, if you don't take it step by step, as Ted Koppel has done in his book, Lights Out - A Cyber Attack, A Nation Unprepared, Surviving the Aftermath. So Ted, let me start this way: you're not really talking about cyber theft of data like the recent Yahoo or DNC or other similar penetrations of corporate and government databases. You're talking about the cyber attacks that have a destructive capability on the electrical grid. And you also talk about electromagnetic attacks. So can you describe those two before we get into what the capabilities of the actors are, and what the defenses maybe in terms of prevention?

Ted Koppel: Sure. I think the first thing, Ralph, is to point out that the danger of an electromagnetic pulse,

and I suspect that if any listeners in the world know what an EMP is, yours would. But for those couple out there who may not know, it essentially entails a nuclear explosion at a high altitude, over the United States that would effectively knockout all electric functions around the country. Could it happen? Yes. Is it likely to happen? No. And essentially, I made reference to it in the book only because it's a possibility that's out there. But I don't spend a lot of time on it, and I suggest we not spend a lot of time on it today.

Ralph Nader: Yeah, because Ted, you do indicate that the approach to it wouldn't require an expenditure of more that 2 billion dollars. And you do dispatch it in a few pages. But your main thrust is cyber attacks on the grid system. Go ahead.

Ted Koppel: That's exactly right. Also, I'd be little cautious, Ralph, about dismissing similarities between what has been going on and how an attack on the grid would take place. The similarities between what we've been seeing over these past few days, and indeed, over the past couple of years, and cyber attacks are actually a daily process. It's been going on now for years but I think the public, as a whole, is just becoming conscious of the fact that this is an ongoing process. What everything has in common is essentially the Internet. The Internet draws so many different capabilities together that those who are able to hack into the Internet. And when you talked about that most recent attack that took place over the past weekend, essentially what we're talking about here is hackers getting in through modern conveniences that we have, and I'll use as the simplest example: using the Internet to control the thermostat in your home so that you can set the thermostat to a point that, in the winter, for example, at 5 o'clock in the morning, it might start raising the temperature in your kitchen from a low of 50 degrees, to a more comfortable 65 or 67. And in the evening, at the time that you go to bed, it will lower the thermostat. And all of this, of course, saves power, saves money, and is a great convenience. But it is also what the cyber specialists in the military would call an "attack surface." It is a point at which an attacker who wants to do harm to the power grid might actually be able to thread his or her way back into - and here it's where it gets a little bit wonky, and then I promise I'll keep it as simple as possible. We have 3200 different electric power companies in this country. They are linked together through the Internet. There is something at the heart of this process called a SCADA System. SCADA is an acronym that stands for Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition. Let me quickly explain why that's necessary. The electric power grid depends on upon a perfect balance being maintained between the amount of electricity that's generated and the amount of electricity that's used. When you're trying to maintain that kind of a perfect balance among 3200 different companies, I analogize to having a giant balloon with 3200 valves. Half of those valves are letting air into the balloon, half of those valves are letting air out. Maintain a perfect balance, and the balloon stays perfectly inflated. Too much air in, the balloon bursts. Too much air out, the balloon collapses. So now, here you have the same kind of balance required among those 3200 companies with power that's being generated, electric power, and electric power that's being used. If someone could get into that SCADA System, that Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition system, they could affect the amount of power that's been generated or communicated or passed on, and you can create cascading failures in the system. The Chinese are already in our system, the Russians are already in our system. And let me pause at this point and let you clarify or to try and get me to clarify whatever it is that I have confused anybody with.

Ralph Nader: Well, you mentioned digital time bombs they are planted in each country's system. I assume we have planted these digital time bombs also in the Chinese and Russian systems as they have in ours. Could you explain what that is in terms of potential, but also in terms of deterrents, like Mutual Assured Destruction in a nuclear weapons situation?

Ted Koppel: That's a terrific question, and it's particularly appropriate, Ralph, because that sort of mutual deterrence that we had - and again, I'm sure that most of your listeners are familiar with the acronym MAD - Mutual Assured Destruction. That essentially was what evolved out of a realization between Washington and Moscow, that we really had no way of sustaining a nuclear attack in this country. And they had no way of really sustaining and surviving a nuclear attack in the Soviet Union. Therefore, what was established was this balance of terror. We wouldn't drop nuclear weapons on the Soviets, because sufficient capability to respond would have survived such an attack that they could then reak untold havoc here in the United

States. And that knowledge in both directions has created - uneasy as it may have been over the years - it has created this balance of terror between the United States and the former Soviet Union, so that thus far, at least, there has been no nuclear exchange. The difference between that and the - what could be - a balance of terror in terms of cyber warfare, is that it becomes terribly difficult in the case of a cyber attack to immediately, or even soon, determine the point of attack. In other words, if you don't know who launched the attack on the electric power grid in this country, if your intelligence people are telling you, "Well, Mr. President, we *think* that it came out of Bolivia. But before Bolivia, it looks as though it came out of Aukland, New Zealand. And before Aukland, it looks as though it came out of Copenhagen." And the President, becoming a little impatient, says, "Well, where their hell did it originate?" "Well sir, as best as we can determine, it originated in Brooklyn." Now you have a problem. Against whom do you respond? You may assume it was the Russians who did it, but you may also assume perhaps it was the Chinese… or maybe the Iranians or the North Koreans. Or it possible - and I don't think any terrorist organization has this capability yet - but I have been told that it is not unreasonable to expect that within the next two to three to four years, a terrorist organization may get that capability. Now, if you can't tell where it came from, against who do you react? And if your enemy knows that you cannot quickly - or possibly, given the chaos that would result after an attack like this - it might take months to determine where it came from. That really makes the likelihood of a cyber attack much greater than the likelihood of a nuclear attack. Is that essentially clear?

Ralph Nader: Yes. Describe what a catastrophic attack would mean to the country? There are three major grids, and why don't you describe, say, one of the worst scenarios?

Ted Koppel: Well, as I said, and I have this from people who were inside the National Security Agency at a very high level, they are convinced that, as I said earlier, both the Chinese and the Russians are already inside the grid and have the capability of taking down all, or at least a major part, of one of those grids. Now, one of those grids, if you talk about the Eastern Interconnect, for example, that covers the entire East Coast all the way west, essentially to the area around Chicago. You're talking about not just millions of people…tens of millions of people. And the question then becomes, how long would it be before the electric power industry would be capable of restoring power to those tens of millions of people? And the estimates that I've heard range from weeks to months, and the most extreme estimates are even one to two years. Now you can imagine if millions of people in this country, particularly in our urban centers, are without electricity, take the lower estimate… for a period of weeks… 6? 8 weeks? How long do you think it would be before there is, first of all, absolute chaos in the streets? Absolute chaos from a health point of view. You take a city like New York with eight million people and you can't flush the toilet. There is no refrigeration in the summer. There is no heating, no lighting, in the winter. You have got a major catastrophe on your hands. Tens of millions of people, either in a condition roughly equivalent to the mid-19th century, but without any of the experience and capability of dealing with that kind of a situation. Or a massive refugee crisis on your hands, where people from the cities are trying desperately to find their way to the light, wherever that may be. Whether that's tens of miles away or hundreds of miles away.

Ralph Nader: No water, no food?

Ted Koppel: Exactly. Just to pick one of those items, Ralph, the food. The US government does have fairly substantial reserves of MREs - Meals Ready to Eat. These are military packages of food, very high in calories, able to sustain life for a long period of time, if you have enough of them. I spoke to the head of the department of Homeland Security for the state of New York in writing the book, and I said, "How many of these MREs do you have?" And he said, "Oh, we've got about twenty-two million." Well, that sounds like a hell of a lot, twenty-two million of the MRE's. But then I did a little quick math and I said, "Wait a second. You've got eight million people in New York alone. If each person consumes one MRE per day, you've got essentially less than a three-day supply." And he said, "That's right." I said, "Then what?" He said, "Then, we're in trouble." Now, one of the things that could be done, but it would require a massive expenditure and a massive program, would be to change from MRE's, because I should point out the reason we don't have larger stockpiles of MREs is that an MRE only has a shelf-life of about 5-years. So the

government is reluctant to buy too many of these because after five years, it's going to have to throw them out. On the other hand, freeze dried food has a shelf life of 25-30 years. But it would cost billions of dollars to have the food grown, to process the food, to store the food. And it would take at least a couple of years to do that. We are not very good in this country at taking preemptive action. We are terrific when, if, in fact, we overreact in the wake of a disaster.

Ralph Nader: Of course, there is also no public transit, no gasoline… it's total chaos as you say. And in your book - we are talking with Ted Koppel, the author of 'Lights Out,' on cyber attack potential - there can be deterrents with major countries because we've had these mutual implants of these digital time bombs. It's going to be very difficult to deter other actors, other than called non-state actors. But you went around the government at highest levels asking, "What are you doing here? What are your preparations?" And one of the most frightening aspects of your book was your interview with Secretary Johnson of the department of Homeland Security, which has over a quarter of millions staff members. Can you describe generally how prepared the federal, state, and local government, and the corporations are, if at all?

Ted Koppel: Well, essentially, Ralph the answer is that whatever plans they have are plans that they have created to deal with natural disasters. They have plans for blizzards, they have plans for floods, they have plans for hurricanes, they have plans for earthquakes. This is unlike a natural disaster, in that there are people who are going to be manipulating what's going on within the electric power grid even as the disaster strikes. So just when people think they are finding a fix for whatever the initial attacks was, the person - the attacker - can, using the Internet and using the route that they have developed… and I don't want to leave the impression that this is anything simple. It is not easy, it requires years of preparation. But once they are in, they are able to confuse and to conceal. And so, they are able to keep this up so that, whereas, at the moment, the Department of Homeland Security… and I can actually recommend to your listeners that they get online. Go to the website of the Department of Homeland Security, go to the FEMA- The Federal Emergency Management Agency website. Go to the website of the Red Cross. In each instance, you're going to find essentially the same plan. And it's the same plan that is supposed to meet just about any catastrophe that confronts the country. And that is, have a 2-3 days supply food, have a 2-3 supply of water, make sure that you have a week's worth of prescription medicine. oh, and absolutely make sure that you have a radio with batteries - a battery-powered radio - so that we can communicate with you. And my question to the Secretary of Homeland Security was, "Mr. Secretary, what's the plan?" And he said, "What do you mean, what's plan? " and he went through essentially the steps that I have just given you. I said, "No, no, no. Is there a specific plan for a cyber attack against the power grid, something that would take out the electricity for weeks or even months for tens of millions of people?" And he sort of pointed to a bunch of white folders on the shelf behind him, and said, "Look, I'm sure there is a plan up there somewhere." The fact of the matter is - there is no plan. And there is no plan because it would require an enormous expenditure of money. And it would require, in effect, warning the American people, that a great danger is looming out there that could very well happen sometime in the next few years. To get back to where we were at the beginning, Ralph… I don't think anybody can doubt, looking at what has been going on in terms of cyber larceny, in terms of cyber intelligence theft, in terms of these probing attacks, such as the one that took place over the past weekend, that the capability exists. Now the question becomes, " What is it that would cause one of the major powers that has that capability to use it?" And I think you can see, in the awkward response that the United States has had thus far to the hacking attack against the Democratic National Committee, Vice President Biden, in an interview on NBC suggested, none too subtly, that there would be a counterattack of sorts. Well, has it happened? Do we know about it? If we don't know about it, will there be political pressure on the administration to take action that can be seen? The whole mystery of cyber attacks and retaliation is that they can take place out of public sight. And you don't know for sure whether an attack has taken place, who initiated that attack, whether a response has taken place, who initiated that response, which raises for me, at least, the interesting question of whether the attack over the past weekend that tripped down so many Internet serviced tools out there, was that, perhaps the Russian saying, "Be careful of what you do?" Because you, arguably, in the United States, are the most vulnerable country in the world. If only because you have a greater dependence on the Internet than any other country in the world.

Ralph Nader: Let me read a passage from your book on pg. 211, which I think frames two questions: How can we prevent it? Certainly, we can deter other large countries from attacking because of the Mutually Assured Destruction point that you made, and for the non-state actors—

Ted Koppel: Except Ralph - forgive me for interrupting - I'm not at all sure the Mutually Assured Destruction works in this case. It only works if you know for sure who your attacker is.

Ralph Nader: That's true

Ted Koppel: And what worries me in particular about this case is - we may not know.

Ralph Nader: So the question of prevention could come down to increasing the sophistication of the defenses of the electric grid at least as a hypothesis. Is that true? Just like you can put stronger armor on mechanized equipment? Is anybody working on increasing the difficulty of penetration with all these electrical companies?

Ted Koppel: Well, I can assure you… yes. Absolutely. I guarantee you that the industry itself is working on it, our intelligence agencies are working on it. I was participating in a conference just over the past weekend. And I was participating on a two-person panel with General Keith Alexander, who was the former director of the National Security Agency. He told our audience that he believes that if the right amount of effort were put into it, and if you can get the collaboration and total cooperation of the industry, that it would be possible within about two years to come up with a defense mechanism. But that's a huge 'if,' because the electric power industry is most reluctant to do anything that it would put it back under government control. At the moment, the industry was deregulated more than twenty years ago. It doesn't want to be re-regulated. And the kind of legislation that the Senate was able to pass, for example, just about a year ago is so pathetically weak and so full of holes that the industry insisted upon, to protect their privacy considerations, competitive considerations with one another, that it effectively is all but useless. One more thing on this point… the Internet was never designed to be defended. It was never designed to be protected. The Internet was designed so that smart people around the world, professors around the world, could communicate with one another in an unimpeded fashion, at the speed of light, regardless of distance, and at no cost. So what was created was a wide open system. We have been trying, after the fact, to patch that system without real effect.

Ralph Nader: Well, let me go back to that passage. I want to read for our listeners, on page 211, of Ted Koppel's book, <u>Lights Out</u>. Quote: "Widespread recognition of the vulnerability of our power grids already exists. Lots of smart people are already offering partial remedies and grappling with solutions. But there is not yet widespread recognition that we've entered a new age in which we are profoundly vulnerable in ways we have never known before. And so, there is neither a sense of national alarm, nor the leadership, to take us where we need to go. Our national leaders are in a precarious place. They recognize the scale of danger that a successful cyber attack represents. However, portraying it too graphically without having developed practical solutions runs the obvious risk of simply provoking public hysteria." I want to focus on the public hysteria. A lot of times officials don't want to level with the country. In fact, in a meeting with MIT Scientists, Secretary of Defense Schlessinger was walking out of the office, and he said to the scientist, "It's good that the American people don't know the total destructive capability of our weapons, like a Trident submarine with multiple warheads." Well, Congress maybe doesn't want to discuss it because of fear of alarming people. The insurance companies - which you discuss here - a colleague of Warren Buffett's says, basically, they can't actuarially estimate the risk. So are we in a sort of gridlock here because people have so much on their minds already, and anxiety and worries, that the power to just don't want to discuss it publicly? Start with Congress.

Ted Koppel: Yeah, I think it's almost a national malaise that we have in this country, Ralph. And Tom Ridge, who was the first Secretary of Homeland Security, I think summed it up very well. He said, "We are essentially a reactive people. We are not a preemptive people." It's very, very difficult before a disaster occurs. I mean, look, I'm telling a man who has spent his whole life going up against the organizations, whether they are institutional, whether they are gigantic businesses or whether they are governmental… you've been doing that for as long as you've been an adult, Ralph, and you know that what I'm saying is true. We would have to expend tens of billions of dollars even to take some of the most simple preemptive measures. By which, I mean, if we went out there and we got a national stockpile of freeze-dried food, at least there would be something to feed the population in an area that has been hit by one these cyber attacks on the grid. If we prepared a plan with some of our rural states that would set up the wherewithal for, in effect, domestic refugee camps… I realize that sounds ludicrous, but all you have to do is take a look at Europe today and see how terribly difficult it is to accommodate hundreds of thousands, or even millions, of refugees when you don't have any preparation and when you haven't created a political willingness to accept. I mean, we just assume that because we're all Americans, that people in one state would, with open arms, welcome tens of thousands of domestic refugees from another state. I don't think that's the case at all. I think we would have tremendous trouble absent preparation. If you've prepared for it, if you've prepared people politically for it, if you have prepared so that there are locations that are ready, there is housing that is ready, there is food that is available--

Ralph Nader: How about a generator?

Ted Koppel: Exactly. How about a generator? [chuckles] How about a lot of generators? Yes. But I mean, in those communities presumably, the electricity is still going to be functioning. I'm not envisioning a United States of America that has gone dark. But even if you only - and I'm putting quotation marks around the "only" - even if you only consider a darkened New York, Connecticut, New Jersey… even if you only consider those, it would be enough to put tens of millions of people in the dark. And the number of refugees, people desperately seeking some kind of support, a place to house their families, feed their families - you can't do something like this on the spur of the moment. You've got to be prepared for it.

Ralph Nader: Let's take another approach. I don't think it's pie in the sky, although it may appear to be. Let's take an enhanced prevention approach through an international cyber security treaty. What's amazing is that nobody is even talking about entering negotiations here. We have treaties controlling nuclear weapon levels. We have international treaties on chemical and biological warfare. There really is no defense against a chemical or biological attack. So we had these treaties, and they were negotiated under Republican as well as Democratic presidents. Nixon, on the biological warfare one, comes to mind. What do you know about what the government, the members of Congress, whoever, are thinking about initiating negotiations for a global international treaty on cyber security? That might also provide more information, more solutions, more resiliency. And so, prevention might reduce the risk.

Ted Koppel: Well, two points on that, Ralph. One, we know for a fact that President Obama has engaged in more than one set of discussions with the Chinese leadership on precisely this issue. I think there have been conversations with the Russians too. But point number two is, unlike the other threat areas that you raised, this is one in which simply having a negotiated treaty with another country or even another hundred countries is not going to eliminate the danger of cyber attacks. Hacking is not necessarily the venue of governments. There are all kinds of criminal organizations that are engaged in hacking. There are all kinds of individual hacktivists out there. And how many times have you read a story Ralph where the hacker who has hacked into, let's say, the Secretary of State's private diary or the Secretary of State's, you know, at least, the scheduling diary that he has, turns out to be an 18-year-old high school student. It doesn't have to to be a government.

Ralph Nader: Well, let me put it this way. I'm looking for openings here, obviously. On page 60 of your

book, you mentioned that some people try to avoid excessive cyber dependency. Some people in government, in Germany and Russia, are considering "A return to typewriters and paper files." And you say you read such stories wistfully, "but without any expectation that the movement will spread. The world is locked into a state of cyber dependency" I looked at that with some favor since I still use an Underwood typewriter [laughter].

Ted Koppel: Good for you.

Ralph Nader: So what do you think actually, in certain situations, of going off the Internet and improving core security that way. I'm talking mostly about sensitive material.

Ted Koppel: I think the key phrase there, Ralph, is "in certain situations." But on a widespread basis is it possible? No. I analogize - as you know in the book - to what happened with the automobile. I can't help but wonder if, and of course, you've devoted a lot of your lifetime to focusing on automotive safety or lack of it. I have to wonder what would have happened if someone had been able to sketch out the future to our city fathers and mothers a hundred and twenty years ago. And point out to them that the automobile, yes, for all its many virtues was going to end up killing 30,000-40,000 of our fellow citizens every year at some point. Would they have gone ahead with the development of the car? But having gone ahead with the development of the car, and having put cars all over the country in every garage around the country, does anybody believe, even though we're talking still to this day about 30,000-35,000 people a year being killed - and I don't know how many of tens of thousands of people being maimed - does anybody believe that you could take away America's automobiles and trucks and motorcycles? Not a chance.

Ralph Nader: Doubtless.

Ted Koppel: And my point is, we have just about reached the same tipping point with the Internet. We have become so dependent upon the Internet in so many different ways. Just look outside the next time you're on the sidewalk on a sunny day and you're seeing people walking by, and at least half the people who are walking by are not talking to one another. They are looking at their iPhone.

Ralph Nader: Well, you also have a lot of attention in your book to how people are preparing, some people, they are called preparers, and you have preparers list--

Ted Koppel: Preppers, Ralph, they call themselves "preppers."

Ralph Nader: Preppers, yeah. The survivalists, they used to be called, with all kinds of equipment and emergency locations and storage of food etc…. can there be an accidental catastrophe with the grid?

Ted Koppel: I don't know. I mean, you know, could someone intending to do a limited damage end up doing extraordinary damage? Sure. I mean, a few years ago, when there was a great power outage in the North East and in parts of Canada, it essentially happened because it was a hot day and some of those major power lines were sagging and hit a couple of branches. And there was cascading failure that ended up with, I think, nine people dying and *billions* of dollars worth of damage and the northeast going dark for 2-3 days. Does it happen accidentally? Of course.

Ralph Nader: Does the Reassurance Industry - that's the reference to Warren Buffet's company, among others - have they sort of given up here since they can't access the risk, are they collecting premiums? Are they doing loss prevention with the electric companies?

Ted Koppel: No, I mean, my reason for going - and I've known Warren Buffet for a number of years, so I went to him knowing that Berkshire Hathaway has a huge insurance business. And he put me in touch with, Ajit Jain who runs that business. And he was very generous in his time, and essentially the bottom line we came down too was Ajit Jain saying, "Look, we will put $5 billion or so at risk, but we're not going to put more at risk than that." And I said, "Well, $5 billion would be a drop in the bucket." And he said, "Oh yes, you're absolutely right. That wouldn't begin to cover the losses." But he said, "At this stage we really incapable of even giving a realistic estimate as to how much might be lost. And therefore," he said, "since we aren't capable of really calculating the odds, we're just not going to engage in that kind of insurance in a serious way." The reason I went to an insurance company on that was I figured that these people are going to be totally unemotional about it. This is a business matter. And as Mr. Jain said to me, if we had force 5 hurricane hit Miami, it would cost - I forget what the amount was - but he was talking about something in the neighborhood of $7 billion. And it was, yes, that would be tough, but essentially he gave it the equivalent of a telephonic shrug. We could deal with that. But the outcome of a cyber attack on the power grid would be so much greater than that, that they can't even estimate it.

Ralph Nader: Well, then what was the reaction to your book with the media, with the government, did they just sort of recognize the validity of what you're saying and produce a massive shrug? Are there going to continue not to highlight this issue - in government and in mass media?

Ted Koppel: Well, it's been a year now. I think the book has sold about 140, 150,000 copies. And it just came out in paperback, so I'm hoping that a lot more people will get to see it. Both the electric power industry and the Department of Homeland Security have responded to it essentially by making it seem as though it's really not worth… you know, the danger is not as great as Ted Koppel would make it seem. The industry is far more, resilient that he realizes. And that's essentially it. They have not - and I take great comfort in this in a bizarre way - they have not attacked any parts of the book as being inaccurate. Nobody questions the interviews that I have done or the people whom I interviewed. Nobody questions the accuracy of what I say except to make the point, "Trust us. The industry is far more resilient than you think it is."

Ralph Nader: Well, this must be very disappointing to you, especially the lack of hearings on Capitol Hill--

Ted Koppel: No, actually, I've testified at a couple of hearings, I've testified at Senate hearings just about three months ago. What I must say--

Ralph Nader: I mean to the point of proposing legislation. I know they heard you out. But Congress is pretty good at hearing people out and then not doing anything…

Ted Koppel: Yes, it is. That's true. But I mean, what I find far more disappointing is we've just gone through one of the longest, ugliest presidential campaigns in my memory, and I suspect yours. And the subject has barely come up.

Ralph Nader: At that point, Steve has a question to ask you about the media and the campaign. He saw you on the Bill O'Reilly Show.

Steve Skrovan: Yeah. Mr. Koppel, just a switch to a more cheery subject, so to speak, if it could be termed that… in the context of your takedown of Bill O'Reilly there, what is your assessment of the media today, and is there anything that we've done about that?

Ted Koppel: How much time do we have here? [laughter]

Ralph Nader: I think he's asking compared to when you and Walter Cronkite and Edward R. Murrow… those years, compared to now?

Ted Koppel: Well, the problem is multi-layered. And putting it in the context that Ralph just did, it's fairly easy to draw the contrast. Because when Walter Cronkite was at his peak, there were the three networks - ABC, NBC, CBS - and that was essentially it. There was no cable, there was no Internet, there was no satellite television. And fundamentally, the three networks were allowed to make sufficient money with the entertainment programs on the condition that they have - as I recall the FCC language - it was to operate in the public interest, necessity, and convenience. And essentially what that meant was, go ahead and make all the money you want with your comedies and your Westerns and your detective shows, but we expect you to have news departments that cover the news and, in effect, give the American public the information it needs to know. With the evolution of all these other media out there; everything from the satellites and the cable television, to the Internet and the blogosphere and social media - you now have so many thousands of different outlets, all still competing for essentially the same audience, that the pressure on the networks in particular to provide news that is really more entertaining than it is informative, has been huge. And the most immediate impact of that has been terribly visible over this campaign season because Donald Trump, who has been very open about using his capacity to draw attention, to gain attention, by saying outrageous things, he has made himself catnip to the networks, to the cable channels, to the Internet. He told me at one point, "I don't need you guys anymore," he said, in effect, talking to me, "I don't need you guys anymore, because I've got 20 million followers on Twitter and Facebook." Well, that, in a nutshell, is the problem. The problem is that the networks, which once used to focus their attention on giving the public the information that it needed to know - didn't do a perfect job at it - I don't want to romanticize the way it was - but it was better than it is right now. Right now, they are under such tremendous economic pressure to give the public what it wants, that you have a lot of programming on the Kardashians, for example.

Ralph Nader: And there were a lot of serious issues discussed on the Phil Donahue Show, even sometimes on Mike Douglas Show in the afternoon, the Merv Griffin Show. Of course, Dick Cavett had a serious show. They are all gone. Local serious talk radio, like Michael Jackson in Los Angeles… gone. What's the turnaround? We have more ways to convey information than ever before, and more of it's becoming fluff and entertainment and insults. How do we turn this around, at least partially?

Ted Koppel: I'm not sure you can, Ralph. I'm not sure it can be turned around. This is… this really is a tsunami of information out there. I'll give you one very quick example. I don't know how many of your listeners or whether you saw the movie "Argo," which is all about the story of a handful of American diplomats and intelligence people who escaped from the US embassy in Tehran when it was taken back in 1979, '80. And they made their way to the Canadian ambassador's residence, and he gave them shelter. I found out about that story at the time. I was covering the State department at the time. And I got a call that afternoon from the Secretary of State, Cyrus Vance, who said, "Ted, I know you've got the story. I'm not denying the story, but I'm asking you not carry it, because I think it will jeopardize the lives of those people. And it may jeopardize the lives of the hostages at the embassy." It is the only time in more than 50 years in this business that I killed a story. Years later, when the movie "Argo," which was based on that story, came out, I found out that my two friends and colleges Marvin Kalb, who was the CBS diplomatic correspondent, Dick Valeriani, who was the NBC diplomatic correspondent, also had that story. Also were called by the Secretary of State, also made the decision, independently, not to carry it. Because there were only three of us, and because all three of us were--and forgive me if I use this term, but I say it with great pride, professional journalists — we were able to keep that story from coming out. You could never do anything like that again. Now, on one level, that's a good thing. We can't keep secrets anymore. But on another level, in that case, I think we saved lives by not putting the story out there.

Ralph Nader: You were very prophetic, Ted Koppel, on your last show of *Nightline*. I remember I watched and then the last few minutes you basically looked at this audience around the country and you said, "If you don't support the serious content on *Nighline*, it's not going to be *Nighline* anymore." Implying it will

become more fluff and more entertainment. What do you think happened?

David Feldman: He specifically warned that he was afraid that 11:30 would be turned over to late night comics, which ended up being true.

Ted Koppel: And it was. And look, I can't criticize my colleagues at ABC for what's happened. What I'm telling you is there is a new economic reality out there. And for many years, for twenty-six years, I was able to keep the focus of *Nightline* largely on a serious material. And I watched the ratings go down over the years. There was a time in 1990 for example, I remember at one point, we had a nightly audience on *Nightline* of about ten million people. That is a huge, huge audience. These days, a program that has 10 million viewers would be a big hit in prime time. *Nightline* today, I suspect, probably has an audience of maybe 1.5-2 million.

Ralph Nader: This is extraordinary. We need to bring together a serious part of our society and at least have a cable channel or programs that will deal with the 5-10 million people who don't want just entertainment and fluff or sports. [crosstalk]

Ted Koppel: I mean you do have - all you have to tell your listeners out there and political followers of yours over the years are, "watch PBS." PBS still does a very serious job…the *PBS News Hour*… does a very serious job of covering the news every evening. NPR still does a very serious job on its news programs throughout the day of covering the news. *Morning Edition* is a serious program. *All Things Considered* is a serious Program. But we are talking about a relatively small percentage of the American viewing and listening public, and the number of people who read the *New York Times* or the *Wall Street Journal* or the *Washington Post* every day is going to go down. And I suspect that what we're going to be seeing after this election, if the polls are right and Mr. Trump is defeated, I think you will see him and a bunch of colleagues back with a new network of their own that will probably make us look wistfully back at the days when *Fox News* was about as far right as things got.

Ralph Nader: A subject for another hour, Ted, because there are things going on that are encouraging. It's good that Amy Goodman on *Democracy Now* has a good solid audience. But the old saying is, you really can't have a democracy without a democratic media. And Steve, did you have a final question?

David Feldman: I had a question, I have a very quick question. You grew up in England, and they're notorious for flame-throwing newspapers, but the BBC has saved Great Britain with amazing journalism. Why isn't the PBS in this country equivalent to the BBC? Why aren't we building up a government sponsored organization? You know, the CBO? The Congressional Business Office…

Ted Koppel: Just be a little careful how wistful you are about the BBC, because the BBC has been losing a lot of ground and is being subjected to the same economic forces that exist in this country. The BBC today is not what it was 30 or 40 years ago.

Ralph Nader: And its budget is being been cut.

Ted Koppel: Exactly.

Ralph Nader: Well, we've been talking with Ted Koppel, author of <u>Lights Out</u>. And he's giving us a very serious warning which should not produce hysteria, but should produce a deliberative, democratic response in Congress and other institutions, so we can engage in prevention first, and some degree of preparation. Thank you very much, Ted.

Ted Koppel: It's a pleasure, Ralph, and I'm glad to have been able to repay you for the great courtesy you've always shown me over the years.

Ralph Nader: Well, you're very welcome. Let's stay in touch.

Ted Koppel: All right. Bye, bye.

Ralph Nader: Thank you.

David Feldman: We have very little time remaining, but we lost a great man this week. Tom Hayden, who served in the California State Assembly, I believe, after years of taking to the streets. Your thoughts on Tom Hayden?

Ralph Nader: Well, imagine coming out of University of Michigan at age 22. He drafted the Port Huron Statement with a group of other progressive students that launched activism on student campuses against the Vietnam War and many other inequities in our society. And he did it in mobilizing, as you say, people in the streets, marches, demonstrations… very courageous, and of course his role in the 1968 Democratic Convention in Chicago reflected his persistence and his personal courage in that "police riot" as an investigative report described it. He did, then, go into more formal politics. As you said, he was elected for a number of years to the State Assembly in California. He ran unsuccessfully for some other offices, such as the Governor of California. And he continued to write books and to speak and to defend the Democratic Party against Green Party challenge. He really was a committed person in terms of trying to change to the Democratic Party in his later years. But he'll go down in American history as one of the great active citizens on the most important questions facing our country. And we're going to have a serious loss of civic energy with the passing of Tom Hayden.

Steve Skrovan: Ralph, what was your personal relationship with him?

Ralph Nader: Well, from time to time, we talked about forming coalitions on matters such as energy. I didn't really participate in many of his rallies, nor did he in ours. But I know a vigorous, active persistent, long-distance runner citizen when I see it. And he will go down as a historic figure.

Steve Skrovan: All right, David anything else?

David Feldman: Yeah. I kind of, because I have kids, I always point to Tom Hayden's later work and say, if you really want to break things, go to the California State Assembly, or go to Washington DC. That's where you can break things and really effect change. But his years in the street, those were important too, right?

Ralph Nader: Very much so. The phrase "The Whole World Is Watching," which was attributed to the street action around the Democrat National Convention in 1968, illustrated his productive use of the mass media at that time, which was censorious, in many ways, of progressive causes. But he and his colleagues developed so many marches and rallies and so many pointed criticisms that the mass media just couldn't ignore it.

Steve Skrovan: Well, that's our show. I want to thank our guest Ted Koppel, author of Lights Out. We will link to all the relevant content on the Ralph Nader Radio Hour web page.

David Feldman: A transcript of this episode will posted on RalphNaderRadioHour.com

Steve Skrovan: For Ralph's weekly blog, go to Nader.org

David Feldman: To catch up with what you missed at the Breaking Through Power Conference, go to breakingthroughpower.org. All of the speakers are archived there. That's also where you can also you can order Ralph's new book Breaking Through Power - It's Easier Than You Think.

Steve Skrovan: Remember to visit the country's only law museum, the American Museum of TORT Law in Winsted, Connecticut. Go to tortmuseum.org.

David Feldman: The producers of the Ralph Nader Radio Hour are Jimmy Lee Wirt and Matthew Marran.

Steve Skrovan: Our executive producer is Alan Minsky.

David Feldman: Our theme music, "Stand Up, Rise Up," was written and performed by Kemp Harris.

Steve Skrovan: Join us next week on the Ralph Nader Radio Hour when we will be talking to author Dan Zak about his book, Almighty: Courage, Resistance, and Existential Peril in the Nuclear Age. We'll talk to you then, Ralph.

Ralph Nader: Thank you all. And for the listeners, I hope you focus on the need for international cyber security treaty. I think that opens up a lot of windows, opens up a lot of prevention, focuses the members of Congress on their duties. And reduces some of the fatalism and resignation that some people incorporate when they hear the story of Ted Koppel's book.