

RALPH NADER RADIO HOUR EP 240

Michael Lighty

Steve Skrovan: Welcome to the Ralph Nader Radio Hour. My name is Steve Skrovan. Unfortunately, David Feldman is having some technical difficulties. So he's not joining as of yet. He may jump in a little bit later but we do have the man of the hour, Ralph Nader. Hello, Ralph.

Ralph Nader: Hello Steve, we'll miss David.

Steve Skrovan: We do miss David desperately but we're going to soldier on. And I'm going to put some topics on the table here. Last week, President Trump wrote an op-ed, which was published in the USA Today. I think we know enough about Donald Trump, that he probably didn't actually write it himself. It was all about Medicare For All and how bad it would be for America. And not surprisingly, it was full of lies. Just about every major news media organization broadcast, print, and electronic blasted the president for those lies, aside of course from Fox News that just kind of reported on the controversy. Even Jimmy Fallon called him out. And I think we all know that when you've Fallon, you've lost America.

Well, what this attack on Medicare For All indicates to me is that the Republicans are very afraid of this idea. So on the show today, we are going to talk with an activist who has been campaigning for Medicare For All. He is actually on tour promoting it all across the country. He's going to come to us from a tour stop in Dallas this week and his name is Michael Lighty. He is the Director of Public Policy for National Nurses United. I actually have a soft spot for nurses. My mother was a nurse. So who are you going to trust about your healthcare, Donald Trump or my mother? We'll talk with Mr. Lighty in the first half of the show. In the second half of the show, we're going to talk about Ralph's latest book.

I know some of you might be thinking, wait, didn't you just do a show about Ralph's latest book? We did--the fable HOW THE RATS RE-FORMED THE CONGRESS. This is a new book--Ralph writes books like I change shirts, people) entitled, TO THE RAMPARTS: how Bush and Obama paved the way for the Trump presidency, and why it isn't too late to reverse course. We're going to dig into that one as well as make our way through the raft of your listener questions. Somewhere in between we will catch our breath and check in with our Corporate Crime Reporter, Russell Mohkiber with his weekly report on Crime in the Suites. But first, let's talk to someone who is on the ramparts of the healthcare fight.

Michael Lighty is the Director of Public Policy for National Nurses United. For over 25 years, Mr. Lighty has organized, written and spoken for improved Medicare For All. He is currently the lead policy analyst for the Single-Payer Bill, SP562, and the Healthy California Act. At the California Nurses Association since 1994, he has coordinated campaigns for the HMO Patients' Bill of Rights, Clean Money in Elections Campaign, and nationally for a Robin Hood Tax on Wall Street. Welcome to the Ralph Nader Radio Hour, Michael Lighty.

Michael Lighty: Thank you so much, Steve and I should say that I am currently on sabbatical from National Nurses United. So they have generously given me some time off to do this work.

Ralph Nader: Well, Michael, welcome indeed. I go back a long way with the California Nurses Association. We went up and down the State of California once in buses pressing for a statewide initiative, which was on the ballot to give single-payer full Medicare For All, free choice of doctor and hospital to the people of California. Unfortunately, the industry spent a lot of money on TV to distort it and we lost that fight, which is a fight we are continuing all over the country. Here is my first question. You and I and others have read and written, spoken about full Medicare For All single payer for years. I'm astonished at how little reference there is in the media to this country to the north of us called Canada where the people look like us and where in the late 60s and early 70s, starting in Saskatchewan, the province, they installed a single-payer system that is public funding of healthcare, private delivery of healthcare--this is not socialized medicine as Britain has--and it works. Every healthcare system in the world has problems. We should have Canada's problems! They cover everybody in Canada at a per capita average half of what we spend and we have 29 million people without any health insurance even with Obamacare and 30 million more underinsured. And so in Canada, they spend about \$4500, give or take, per capita a year, to cover everybody and we spend over \$9500 a year to cover not everybody, and in Canada they have their free choice of doctor and hospital, they have better outcomes, they have far less anxiety dread and fear, they don't not move from one job to another because they might not get health insurance in their second job, and on and on. Why isn't there more mention of Canada to make the case for single payer here?

Michael Lighty: Well, Ralph, that is a very good question and it is a great honor to be on this show with you and talk about it because what's funny about it is, we hear often as we go around the country encountering these anecdotal stories about, 'Oh my God, my aunt couldn't get a hip surgery in Canada for six months.' But what you just outlined is the truth rather than those anecdotes. And it's no wonder that you don't hear Canadians clamoring for the US healthcare system. So yeah, let me have Aetna instead, you know, it just doesn't happen. And the reason I think we don't talk enough about Canada is because it's part of media narrative that says, government can't do anything right.

And when it comes to healthcare that's the last thing we want. And it turns out in fact that the Canadians have discovered that not only is government more efficient, but having the Canadian Medicare, and that's what they call it, brings the country together. It both rises from a sense of social solidarity, it enhances it and builds upon that. And so when you talk to Canadians, you find that Canadian Medicare occupies a central role in the national identity. And that's very threatening, I think for a lot of folks on the American side because it contrasts with the supposed individualism, hyper-individualism that characterizes our society. So the neighbor to the north, as you say, that looks very much like us, in terms of they're a much more diverse country than people realize and it has a very similar economy and kind of population. So we don't want in the media narrative to make that comparison because it is unfavorable to the American system.

Ralph Nader: That's a good point, like the Reader's Digest is always distorting what's going on in Canada in the healthcare area. In Canada, nobody dies because they can't afford health insurance to get diagnosed and treated in time. In the US, even after Obamacare, based on a Harvard Medical School peer-reviewed study by Drs. Woolhandler and Himmelstein, about 35,000 Americans die every year because they can't afford health insurance to get diagnosed and treated in time and of course far greater numbers get sick and injured for that cause--that is they can't afford health insurance. And I might add that the attack on Canada is almost always focused on delays.

Well, first of all, when the Conservative Party took over in Ontario, they closed 23 hospitals. That's not good for preventing delays. There are forces in Canada that want to monkey wrench the system and they're helped by US companies that want to get in there and make profit. But I know a lot of people in Canada; I have relatives in Canada. And they don't have to wait except for elective surgery, for example, they may have to wait. But how long is the wait when you don't have health insurance and you can't pay for anything in the US? It's interminable. And in Berkeley sometimes you have to wait months for certain procedures. There aren't enough primary care doctors in the US, so even with this huge profit-making system, there are all kinds of blockages.

And in Canada, you don't have a drug industry that says, pay or die the way our out-of-control drug industry, profiteering, outsourcing to China, bringing the drugs in without adequate supervision by the FDA. We had a program on that by the author of *China Rx*, a wonderful, alarming book. So I think one way we should start taking single payer to a higher level--already HR 676 in the House of Representatives, as you know, Michael, has over 120 signers, all of them Democrats. So it's not like starting from the scratch. We ought to talk more about the Canadian experience on the ground for Canadian families.

Michael Lighty: I agree and I think, Ralph, that what you say about delays is so true. If you actually look at the studies like the Commonwealth Fund does, you find that the US, to get a specialist can take as long as six weeks. And within the US when you get diagnosed with something that requires a specialist, that's not elective. That's serious and urgent. In many cases folks cannot get access to those appointments and that's just kind of the random experience people have. The notion in the US that's so counterproductive is that Americans use too much healthcare. And in fact we use less healthcare; we have less access. And as you say, that's in part because of uninsured, but also particularly the underinsured.

We know from, again, Commonwealth Fund research that 42% of Americans with insurance are forgoing treatment--either a doctor visit, a prescription or another kind of treatment--those are folks with insurance who can afford it! So the barriers to care are real and the principle that Canada has solved that we have to talk about is guaranteed healthcare with no barriers to care. And that principle simply does not apply in the US system except to the very wealthy.

Ralph Nader: And the profiteering is staggering. You've done research with the California Nurses Association on the CEO pay. Why don't you talk about the CEO pay of these giant hospital chains and other similar corporations?

Michael Lighty: Well, exactly, you've got the insurance industry--the top five health insurance company CEOs make between \$20 and \$66 million a year in compensation. Steven Hemsley who runs UnitedHealth Group out of Minnetonka, Minnesota, is at the \$66 million level. And that's not just for the for-profit insurers, it is typical that CEOs of nonprofit hospital chains make \$7 to \$10 million annually. Just CEOs of hospital chains who are nonprofit, supposedly charitable institutions. This executive compensation, we identified in California over two dozen, not CEOs, but just two dozen executives in health insurance companies who make over a million dollars a year.

And then you look at hospitals, it's not unusual to have medical directors making seven-figure salaries. Administrators, as I mentioned, \$7 to \$10 million. You've got at the same time a huge rise in the number of administrators in hospitals and a reduction or a flat-lining of doctors and nurses. So the whole system

is skewed, as you say, to profit making. And the result of that profit making are executives and in the for-profit industry, they're driving short-term results, restricting access to care in order to pad the bottom line--raise the stock price.

Ralph Nader: You said the head of United Healthcare, which administers AARP's Medigap Insurance. You know that, right?

Michael Lighty: Oh, yes. Oh, yes, yes.

Ralph Nader: Yeah, okay.

Michael Lighty: So seniors are...basically this is of course the corruption of the system. Our premiums are promoting a business model that requires tax subsidies, but enables huge profits at the same time they restrict our care.

Ralph Nader: Now, listen to this, listeners. If you are a CEO like the CEO of United Healthcare making over \$60 million a year, that breaks down to over \$30,000 a hour, eight hours a day. \$30,000 an hour, eight hours a day; shame on us for allowing this happen, number one. And number two, why don't you talk about the incidents of malpractice in this country?

Michael Lighty: Well, the incidents of malpractice is basically insurance company policies and executives who kill people. And we know for example that Cigna denied treatment to a young woman, Madeline Sarkesian, a few years ago, resulted in her not getting liver transplant that would have saved her life. And these executives refuse to be accountable for the death that they are causing among folks who have their policies. And instead it's essentially a failed business model, Ralph, because you know that we pay over \$340 billion in subsidies to employers so they can buy this private insurance in reaching these executives. And at the same time, it's a failed business model as a result because without those subsidies, no one could afford to buy their product.

Ralph Nader: And, by the way, half of the healthcare expenditure in this country, which is about \$3.5 trillion is paid by taxpayers.

Michael Lighty: That's right. We have a publicly funded system, by and large a publicly funded system, and we're simply not getting our money's worth. So in that sense it's a con because we're paying and subsidizing the purchase of a product that doesn't actually serve our health.

Ralph Nader: We're talking with Michael Lighty who's on sabbatical from the California Nurses Association where he has directed a research group which is very rare for unions that monitored the giant corporations in this industry. I am often astounded at the most articulate supporters of single-payer and they don't make all the arguments that can be made. Here are three arguments that are not made enough. And they're pretty stupendous. Number one, we've had people on this program, who are experts, saying and documenting that 10% of all healthcare expenditures in any given year, at least, is drained away by computerized building fraud and abuse, that's \$350 billion with a B this year. Number two, Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine was only the latest peer-reviewed study coming out with a minimum figure of 5,000 people a week dying from preventable problems inside hospitals--hospital induced infections, malpractice, and other things that are preventable. That's 250,000 Americans a year dying from preventable hospital problems. And the doctors who put this report out a couple of years ago, said, that was their minimal figure. The third is insurance companies and others

fighting to block wrongfully injured medical patients from having their day in court and trial by jury-- using the Law of Torts to get a remedy, to get compensation for their terrible injuries--to disclose some bad practices in healthcare firms around the country and to deter unsafe practices.

Why, Michael Lighty, do not our side—people in Congress, people who write opinion editorials, people who are advocates on the ground—use those three arguments more frequently?

Michael Lighty: Yeah, I think we are caught up in a certain kind of a policy framework that doesn't address and articulate, as you say, some of the systemic problems on the delivery side. Right? We're often focused on the financing side, around insurance, but really, what we're talking about here is what's going on in hospitals and why it is so wasteful to our system as a whole. And there is first huge administrative waste in hospitals--whole departments devoted to billing and claims, pre-authorization and so forth. But you're right. All those issues of hospital-acquired infections, of preventable incidents that result in morbidity, can be prevented in a system that makes patient care the priority.

So from a nurse perspective, those problems relate directly to inadequate staffing. And the reason there are not registered nurses at the bed side is because the bottom line--the insurers don't reimburse sufficiently for that care. And instead hospitals end up going to different care models: boutique services for the wealthy, concierge-type arrangements in the hospitals, moving procedures to outpatient clinics--all these things undermine safety and at the same time enrich the corporations' bottom line, but do not actually provide a single standard of safe therapeutic care for all. And that standard of equitable care is what the nurses promote and the only way to achieve it is yeah, you got to fix the financing and then you got to orient the dollars toward patient care and put doctors and nurses more directly in charge, improve staffing and have the resources to adequately deliver care rather than siphon off into administrative waste, deficiency and drug- company profits, which is where huge amounts of the dollars go instead.

Ralph Nader: And you know, the California Nurses pioneered under RoseAnn DeMoro, its leader who recently retired, what's called Adequate Staffing in Hospitals, (the ASH model), because these big corporations who pay their executives humongous money try to cut costs by replacing skilled nurses with what they called in California "care buddies". And of course, that leads to so many preventable problems and serious injuries, deaths and other horrific situations.

Michael Lighty: That's right. That's exactly right, Ralph. And the only way to get... to put nurses in charge and to have adequate staffing is to take all of those profit imperatives away from the system and not pay CEOs \$7 to \$10 million, but actually pay more nurses and hire more nurses, pay the CEOs less, and that's how you can improve care. We've got to move from a system that is trying to restrict access to care in order to save money, to a system that delivers care based upon patient need, and those providers are compensated for that and not just all the other ancillary services and profit-making that goes on.

Ralph Nader: We're talking to Michael Lighty, who is on sabbatical from his position as Research Director for the California Nurses Association. I loved it, Michael, when the nurses picketed Wall Street-- they picketed down in Washington, had a march. I spoke to one of their gatherings near the White House, pushing for a transaction tax, a speculation tax on Wall Street sales of stocks, bonds, derivatives and using some of that money—hundreds of billions of dollars could be collected—to provide health

insurance for everyone. Not many unions do that. This is the most dynamic union in the country. And from that comment, let's go into what can we do about it.

So let me give you a hypothetical. When Bill Clinton wanted to expand healthcare coverage, he had Hillary assigned to the job in the 1990s. I looked around the country and I said, I wonder how many full-time organizers there are in congressional districts trying to get this done, because, you know, throughout American history, no major social justice movement occurred without field organizers-- whether it's a Labor Movement, the Farmers' progressive Movement in the late 19th Century, or the Civil Rights Movement. And I couldn't even come up to the number of 100 full-time people working on this. And that holds true when Obama tried to expand healthcare coverage. Don't you think that's one of the major flaws in organized labor, Michael Lighty?

They got their health insurance, they could have got it for the rest of our country if they had enough field organizers from their surplus funds. Give me your comment on that.

Michael Lighty: I do think that we have to recognize, Ralph, that you're right, we've had historic moments, 1993 which you're speaking of where the AFL-CIO decided to endorse Hillarycare instead of single payer and also there was a great effort to get behind the Affordable Care Act in the public option. I do think that they put organizers in the field on that effort to a greater level, but essentially you're right because workers are desperate for a different system, and the only way to organize that is on a grassroots basis and put organizers out there. We've been doing that through National Nurses United, but it's not sufficient. And so what we found is that at the base Medicare For All single payer is hugely popular, right?

You've seen the polls; the Reuters Poll had 70% overall--85% among Democrats, 52% among Republicans. And we know that workers who voted for Donald Trump--who make \$30,000 or less--52% of them in 2016 supported it. So the only way we're going to do this is through mass action and a mobilization and maximum pressure on members of Congress. And currently that's going on in some states; there's door-knocking going on. We're trying to make Medicare For All essentially a litmus test in 2018--make it the defining issue in 2020. Eighty-five percent of Democrats support it, yet there's not a mobilization; there's not a media narrative that reinforces it. And the only alternative really to Medicare For All is going to be increasingly more cost onto workers and a kind of "you're on your own" (YOYO) healthcare system where you literally only get the healthcare you can afford.

Ralph Nader: You know, and loss of life, loss of limb, loss of health when you can't afford healthcare to get diagnosed and treated. I don't think the heads of the Democratic Party are fully on board for single payer in this coming election next month. Are they really on board, the Democratic National Committee (DNC)?

Michael Lighty: No.

Ralph Nader: Are they still footsying around and trying to repress the insurgency that's going on among progressive candidates around the country in the Democratic Party?

Michael Lighty: I think you're onto it. They are trying to stifle this. I mean, imagine, Ralph, a political party anywhere else in the world, that doesn't pursue a program that 85% of its supporters want. It's inconceivable. And so here you see the gap between the base and the donors, because the donor class of the Democrats are the ones who are invested in Wall Street, who would be affected by this

speculation tax that could fund human-need programs that would be affected by the rollback of insurance company profits. And it's that class that were up against represented by the Democratic leadership. Chuck Schumer was horrified at the notion that Democrats would support the elimination of private health insurance and yet it is literally killing people. So this disconnect is becoming intolerable, I think, and ...

Ralph Nader: And Donald Trump, you know, thinks that the Democrats are so relatively passive on this, that he can actually come out against full Medicare For All, come out against the majority of the American people, and get away with that absurdly false column in USA Today, which by the way, Robert Weissman rebutted, the head of Public Citizen, and that's on the website citizen.org if you want the rebuttal. For our listeners who are going to flood the members of Congress, I hope, with phone calls after this program, Michael Lighty, to increase their level of impatience. Historically, in effect, full Medicare was proposed by Harry Truman; the American Medical Association blocked it in the 1940s. It was put forward tenuously by Lyndon Baines Johnson, in the 1960s; he backed away and just went for Medicare and partial Medicaid because of all the money the Vietnam War was costing. The Vietnam War is reported to have cost millions of Vietnamese lives and about 55,000/60,000 American lives, but it really cost a lot more American lives because by blocking full Medicare For All, it blocked the way to save over 45,000 American lives a year from the 1960s to the present day. So this has been going on a long time. It's ridiculous; it shows we are a weak democracy. We can flip this thing into humane full Medicare For All, which by the way, produces a lot better collective data on trends and perils than 1500 insurance companies with proprietary data manage to do.

This can move very quickly in Congress and once you get it in Congress overwhelmingly, it doesn't matter who is in the White House. It's a wave of humanity; a wave of catching up to Western countries who have universal health insurance; a wave to catch up to Taiwan and Japan who have universal health insurance. And everyone has got to do their part. There's no such thing as, 'Oh, I'm listening to this program, it's interesting, Ralph, but I'm just one person.' You get several neighbors to make the calls. You buttonhole the members who come back in the next month looking for your vote for members of Congress--or even your own state legislative members--to put the heat on Congress. What do you recommend in terms of increasing the heat here, Michael? You know more about this than anybody.

Michael Lighty: I think we got to build organization, Ralph, and I think we've got to use that organization to build mass support. And I actually think that it requires everything we can do. But what it requires most is a strategic sense of really competing for power and be bold and make an aspirational, affirmative demand for guaranteed healthcare through Medicare For All. That represents an alternative vision to what the Republicans represent--of what the donor class or corporate Democrats represent. And, I honestly believe that if we are able to build the presence in every congressional district, as you've talked about, it is not a partisan issue. We can move Republicans who represent working-class folks. We can move Democrats who wouldn't otherwise do this because it's not "safe". And it's only through that popular mobilization—you and I have talked about this, right?--there are small tactics we can do: letters to the editor matter, small group meetings that then build into a door-to-door canvass and that door-to-door canvass recruits people to a town hall that tells stories about how inadequate the system is. And those stories point to an alternative. And then we build a bigger meeting that then is able to mobilize direct actions in members of Congress at their offices--at the district levels. Get into small- and medium-market papers; obviously we're building a story and a narrative about healthcare in the social media. I think we literally have to do it all. But what is particularly frustrating is we've never seen the level of

resource commitment either from organized labor or nonprofit foundations for Medicare For All that we've seen for every other type of liberal reform, right? \$80 million to support the Auto Credit for America (ACA). We have never seen \$5 million committed nationally to win Medicare For All. We are going to have to have resources to hire and put organizers on the ground. And that is really the demand we've got to make on our institutions. So if you support single payer then actually put money and people behind it. And if we had everyone who supports it actually working for, it would change the political expectation that we can't win it. And in fact, this is a winnable issue. It's a unifying issue. It brings people together because this is a public policy that affects us in a most intimate way in our lives.

Ralph Nader: Do you hear that, listeners? This is a winnable issue. First of all, you have the single-payer bill; it has been in the House called HR 676. It is supported by more than 120 Democrat Representatives in the House. That's means 120 congressional districts back home—they're already on your side. And you can get it up to 190 pretty quickly if you make this a big issue and candidates start winning on this issue. And then it's off to the races--once the wave from the public, once the rumble from the public gets going--it's unstoppable! It's a situation where the people lead and the leaders follow. Go to citizen.org to get information about how to organize for single payer. It's Public Citizen. Go to citizen.org.

Last words before we conclude, Michael Lighty.

Michael Lighty: This can be a unifying issue. This can bring working people together to define the issue that is most affecting us every day. We can actually use this as a model for making the decisions that determine our destiny. And this demand needs to resonate and really people need to understand that this is a popular program; it works. If we build a movement, we will win it, and we can break through power as you say, on this question, and it will open up possibilities that right now seem so distant. And I really urge folks to engage in this issue. Talk to your friends.

Ralph Nader: And listen, over 75% of the people on your side, a majority of doctors even on your side, they want to practice medicine, not bookkeeping and be harassed by bureaucrats in the corporations. And also, a huge majority of nurses are on your side. So what are you waiting for, folks? You outnumber these corporations vastly. Take it over. Thank you very much, Michael Lighty of the California Nurses Association.

Michael Lighty: Thank you, Ralph, onward.

Steve Skrovan: We've been speaking to Michael Lighty, on sabbatical as Policy Director from National Nurses United who's campaigning across the country for Medicare For All. We will link to his work at ralphnaderhour.com. Now we are going to take one minute break and send you over to the National Press Building in Washington DC to hear from our Corporate Crime Reporter, Russell Mohkiber. When we come back, we're going to talk about Ralph's new book, TO THE RAMPARTS and also plough through some listener questions. You're listening to the Ralph Nader Radio Hour, don't go away.

Russell Mohkiber: From National Press Building in Washington DC, this is your Corporate Crime Reporter "Morning Minute" for Friday, October 19th, 2018. I'm Russell Mohkiber. Credit Suisse Securities will pay \$10 million to settle charges brought by the Securities and Exchange Commission and the New York Attorney General regarding material misrepresentations and omissions made in connection with its now closed Retail Execution Services Business's handling of certain customer orders.

The settlements required Credit Suisse to pay \$5 million to the SEC and \$5 million to the New York Attorney General. Credit Suisse created the RES desk to execute orders for other broker dealers that handle order flow on behalf of the retail customers. The SEC's order finds that although RES promoted its access to dark-pool liquidity to customers, the firm executed an exceedingly minimal number of held orders--orders that must be executed immediately at the current market price--in dark pools from September 2011 to December 2012. For the Corporate Crime Reporter, I'm Russell Mohkiber.

Steve Skrovan: Thank you, Russell. So Ralph, I was watching MSNBC yesterday and who appears with Ari Melber in between two guys, two DJs or something, it's you and you were talking about your new book. Tell us about your new book.

Ralph Nader: Well, it's called TO THE RAMPARTS: how Bush and Obama paved the way for the Trump presidency and why it isn't too late to reverse course, but it goes even further back. You remember, Ronald Reagan was a fabricator. He smiled, he shrugged his shoulders, but he said to the press on two occasions, "Nuclear missiles, once released, they can always be recalled" or when he was asked about homelessness, he said, "You know, some people like to sleep out." When he was asked about hunger, he said, "Oh you know, there are people who are on a diet." And the worst one, and he got away with this as Governor of California speaking to the Chamber of Commerce in California at a luncheon--he was asked, governor, what do you think about the emerging African nations? And Reagan shrugged his shoulders and smiled, cocked his head and said, "Well, when these guys have you to lunch, they really have you the lunch." That's his quote.

Steve Skrovan: Yeah.

Ralph Nader: I mean, so you can see he fabricated government statistics, he turned things up and down that were true and he made them fake. And Donald Trump is watching this. A younger Donald Trump is watching this, and watching him get reelected in a landslide against Walter Mondale in 1984. And then comes along George Herbert Walker Bush and could have prevented the Gulf War easily, the way the British did just when Saddam Hussein was rumbling his tanks toward Kuwait. He could have sent, you know, he's allied formerly with Kuwait, the US, he could have sent paratroopers group, the way the British did years earlier. And Saddam would not have invaded Kuwait. Instead there was a bloody war, tens of thousands Iraqis destroyed, you know, the drinking water and electrical systems in Baghdad destroyed. And it laid the groundwork for the invasion of Iraq by his son, George W. Bush and Cheney and then came along Bill Clinton and he broke the norms on proper standards in treating women. And he was in all kinds of trouble with various women that he dealt with.

Steve Skrovan: Dealt with, that's a very charitable way to say it. Dealt with, yes.

Ralph Nader: Yeah, and he cheated on his wife and he got away with it. And Donald Trump, the philanderer, the abuser of women is looking at this on TV and saying, oh, this is interesting. And now along came George W. Bush and smashed all respect for our Constitution, international law, federal statutes, Geneva Conventions by his criminal invasion of Iraq and his sending drones all over and Special Forces, and Donald Trump is looking at this and saying, heck he got reelected over John Carey; he got away with it. Well, you know, nobody has an antenna sensitive as George W. Bush except Donald Trump. And Donald Trump could write a book called Getting Away with it All. And he's watching all this, and along comes Obama and instead of waging peace, Obama extends the drone strikes in Afghanistan and all over and allows Hillary to persuade him to blow apart Libya, which is still being blown apart,

spilling into neighboring African countries--chaos, violence, militias. And Donald Trump is watching this and says, hey, you know, Obama did all this and the Democrats reelected him in 2012. What's there not to like? At the same time the people back home, enough of them didn't do their homework; enough of them didn't think of their own self-interest, when all of these politicians screwing around, freezing the minimum wage, not giving them full health insurance, full Medicare For All, not cranking down on corporate crime, fraud and abuse, looking the other way at huge waste and the expenditure of government taxpayer dollars, looking the other way when they bailed out Wall Street and they bail out everyday subsidies handouts, various businesses. And you know, when you get enough people in this country who don't take their voting duties seriously enough a) to vote, over half the people stay home, or about half in presidential elections—it's even higher in congressional election year, or who don't even do their homework for an institution like Congress that spends 24% of their income. Imagine if a neighbor spent 24% of your income and could allow neighboring factory to pollute the air and water for your children to be exposed, would you spend a little time trying to straighten out your neighbor or making your neighbor accountable?

So that's what this book TO THE RAMPARTS does, Steve. It tries to say, look, Donald Trump didn't come out of some UFO. He didn't come out of some reality show. He came out from a political climate that enabled him to take all these things to an even deeper ditch. And if we don't learn from that we'll think that, oh, when Trump is gone or resigned or doesn't get reelected we'll be back to normal. No. We're not going to be back to normal, because both parties have endorsed this degraded level of political irresponsibility, runaway government waste, runaway corporate-crime wave, and the people left holding the bag.

Steve Skrovan: So Donald Trump is an obvious liar. How would you compare his lying to say what you called fabrications that Reagan made? And you know, it kind of sounds like what we talked with Allan Nairn about where he admits I'm a crook and people kind of found that refreshing, because they think they're all liars.

Ralph Nader: Donald Trump just magnified it. In other words, where Reagan would say 100 fabrications, let's say, Donald Trump would say several hundred fabrications. The New York Times has documented almost 6000, what they called misstatements/fabrications that are outright falsehoods, not to mention vituperative insults to individuals who cannot answer back because the press just covers his insults and not the rebuttals by his victims of this verbal sparring. So really it's just more of the same and to be fair to Trump, he is trying to open the door to North Korea, which his Republican and Democratic presidents before him didn't choose to do. It doesn't mean it's going to work, but at least it lowered the level of these counter threats between North Korea's dictator and the US. And remember when Trump said, I have my button on a much bigger number of nuclear missiles, Chairman Kim. So he is lowering the temperature on that for the time being. But by and large, you know, more drones, more Special Forces. I read in the papers the other day that Special US Forces went into over 100 countries last year. And I don't think all of them were legally invited by their respective governments around the world in the various continents.

Steve Skrovan: Well, Seymour Hersh was talking to us a couple of months ago about all the stuff we're doing in Africa that nobody knows about.

Ralph Nader: Yeah, well, that's still a bigger story yet to be disclosed. In fact, do you remember Seymour said that he might write his next book on this? Yeah, we got soldiers and operatives in all kinds

of African countries. It's interesting that most of Africa was broken up in colonies by the French, the British, the Portuguese and even the Germans in the 19th Century and later. And yet they're not as present in these former colonies where they still have, you know, business contacts and educational institutions, religious institutions and so on. Nowhere near is the US Empire.

Steve Skrovan: So TO THE RAMPARTS, is it organized sort of chronologically? Do you take us back to Reagan and then go through HW and then Clinton and Mr. Obama?

Ralph Nader: No, it isn't that. That gets to be a little tedious when you do that. It goes in and out. It has some interesting letters that I've sent to Bush and Obama. It mixes it up. So it makes it more readable. But that's generally the theme. Now, I might add, I didn't do justice to Reagan in terms of his fabrications as Mark Green did when he wrote his famous book, Reagan's Reign of Error. Reagan's Reign of Error by Mark Green, wonderful book, shows how much Reagan got away with just by smiling and shrugging his shoulders and with that nice voice that he had.

Steve Skrovan: Yes, so the avuncular grandpa.

Ralph Nader: Yes, it's true. Some of the stuff in Mark Green's book is just beyond hilarious.

Steve Skrovan: Well, and of course as we all know, regular listeners know, you are always offering a path forward not just lamenting the past. So the second part of it, this is one of the longest titles of books you have which is How Bush and Obama Paved the Way for the Trump Presidency and Why It isn't too Late to Reverse Course. How is it not too late to change course and how does that relate to the fable you just wrote, which we talked about a few weeks ago called, HOW THE RATS RE-FORMED THE CONGRESS.

Ralph Nader: Well, not surprising to a lot of our listeners, I start with the Congress. The Congress is the fulcrum of our Federal Government and a lot of impact at the state and local level. I mean, that's where the appropriations, authorizations war declaration power, confirmation of judges, treaties ratified, hearings on consumer protection, healthcare, minimum wage--all this can start with Congress. And the nice thing about it is it's the tiniest, but most powerful branch of government under our Constitution and it can turn around a lot of the executive branch, certainly can determine public budgets, deflate the bloated wasteful military budget that some retired generals and admirals have been calling for over the years. They can develop a huge jobs program in terms of public repair of our infrastructure, schools and bridges and public transits, sewerage, water systems--you know, the same old list of our crumbling public economy and services, and so it gets back to 1% or less of the people getting together, organizing Congress Watchdog groups. And, you know, I've done this in books and articles and I thought maybe I'll use a little humor. So I did this fable called HOW THE RATS RE-FORMED THE CONGRESS. It's actually quite timely because there's a major rat infestation in Washington DC. It's all over in the alleys and just more and more complaints than ever before to the DC authorities to do something about it.

And it is affecting Congress. They're coming up from the catacombs below the Congress, which is almost something out of science fiction in terms of the fumes and the particulates and the pipes. It's so dangerous they don't allow the Senators and Representatives to go down in an elevator. So in this book, the rats come up to the toilet bowls of the leaders of the House, the Republican, the Democrat--creates huge embarrassment. They try to cover it up. A Damon Runyon-type character a reporter sniffing

around--gets the story, he puts it out all over the country and the rest of the media gets into a frenzy, trying to find out which bowls are being infested, which members of Congress are running off the bowls.

And this developed such derision against an already low-in-the-polls Congress that some activists perk up and say, you know, this is a great opportunity. When is the last time we had so much public attention or interest in members of Congress? And they mobilize from the grassroots up, surround the Congress with hundreds of thousands of people, blowhorns, demanding change, demanding their resignation. Three billionaires come into town, they say, hey, you know, we've got tons of money. Let's help fund these people so they do not go scratching with the tin cup to pay the expenses. And it's a lot of drama--the Wall Street masters get involved with the trade association people and lobbyists in Washington; they're trying to block it, they're trying to infiltrate the crowds with agitators. There's a lot of drama, but there's a lot of realism, Steve. I wish this could become a little movie, it'd be really fun. There's too many Mickey Mouse movies. Let's have a real serious movie where the rats help change the country.

Steve Skrovan: Ralph, you've mentioned this before and I just want to ask you about, you said the Congress is the tiniest branch, the smallest branch of the government. What do you mean by that? There's 535 people, there's only nine people in the Supreme Court, one person in the White House. How is it the tiniest?

Ralph Nader: Well, it's the tiniest compared to the Executive branch. There's no doubt. The Executive branch has over about two million people--military, civil service.

Steve Skrovan: I see.

Ralph Nader: And it's smaller than the Federal Court, because if you take the Federal District Court, the Circuit Court of Appeals and the Supreme Court, that budget is larger than the Congress. And it's smaller in another way--it's personal. People know their names. How many people know the names of the district court judges? You know, half of the people don't know the names of their member of the House to be sure. But, you know, in an instant, they can find their names and a lot of people do know the names of their two Senators and Representative. And why, well, you know, district court judges don't go to clambakes. They don't go to high school reunions and flaunt their presence, but members of Congress do. And they don't like to engage in town meetings created by the citizens with the citizens' own agenda, summoning them and this book by the way, HOW THE RATS RE-FORMED THE CONGRESS has the summons where the citizens summon the Senators and Representatives to their own town meetings and their own agenda. That was a very, very important tool of democracy that I outlined in this book HOW THE RATS RE-FORMED THE CONGRESS. So personal politics should interest people. These Senators and Representatives have their own stories, their own virtues, and their own frailties. They have kids or grandkids, they have their own friends back home. All these can be turned to the good in terms of making them accountable. Right now, Steve, Congress is a bubble in Washington encircled by thousands of corporate lobbyists, wining and dining. And you could almost see a cartoon on that. And the best, short way to describe Congress and its secrecy, and its exclusionary attitudes toward the American people--other than asking them to vote--(they get their money elsewhere as you know)--the best way to describe it in a short number of words, here it is: Congress is open for business but closed for democracy!

Steve Skrovan: Ralph, now, it seems like in the past couple of weeks with this Jamal Khashoggi murder, (that apparently happened in the Turkish Consulate by Saudi Arabia) that some of Trump's own party in the Congress is finally pushing back against him. How do you see that playing out?

Ralph Nader: I don't think that's going to have much stamina. I think the elections, Trump going to their districts, attaching to the Trump aura is going to prevail. Coming up next month, everybody's got to go vote. You don't like who is on the ballot, write in your own name or say none of the above or vote for a third party, but you got to get out and vote, because here is the prediction, Steve: Although more people are expected to vote next month than voted in the past off-year congressional election in 2014, about 115 to 120 million eligible voters, 18 years or older, will not vote. Just think of that number.

Steve Skrovan: Yeah.

Ralph Nader: That's why I say it's easier than we think in how we can turn it around, because most of these bad regimes, won very close. I mean, they either win in Ohio or Florida or Pennsylvania, by very narrow margins, and those margins can be overcome by people going to vote and not staying home. So that's why I want people to really get this book, HOW THE RATS RE-FORMED THE CONGRESS. They can get it by going to ratsreformcongress.org, ratsreformcongress.org and that's a serious website on how you can actually organize a Congressional Rat Watchers group to watch Congress in great detail—a lot of our experience over the years. You can develop your own citizen congressional oversight or watchdog skills by using that website.

And if you want discounts, there are five of these paperbacks offered for \$50 at a discount offer. So you go back to ratsreformcongress.org and buy the paperback or you can buy the hardback, or you can buy five paperback copies for \$50 and you're on your way. It's a lot of fun. I like to say it's better than a good bridge game, but I don't say that too loud, because more people spend more time on their bridge game in one week than the American people spend on Congress. And have you ever seen the magazine for bridge players and all the bridge contests and so on? It's absolutely fabulous.

Steve Skrovan: Yeah.

Ralph Nader: It's unbelievable. There's a complete sub-economy of delightful leisure. I envy that.

Steve Skrovan: Yeah, yeah, well, we will link to ratsreformcongress.org with ralphnaderhour.com as well as the even newer book, TO THE RAMPARTS: how Bush and Obama paved the way for the Trump presidency and why it isn't too late to change course. But right now, Ralph, we've got some listener questions on the docket. Are you ready for me to throw a few of those at you?

Ralph Nader: Here we go.

Steve Skrovan: Here we go. Our first one comes from a listener, Tammy Letts, who says, Ralph, can you address these two issues? 1) How can we legally obtain the names of those in Congress sued for sexual assault/harassment with claims paid out by a secret taxpayer-funded slush fund? Doing so might show Congress they are not above the law. And 2) How could we start a movement to repeal taxpayer-funded pensions for Congress? Perhaps if we ban them from legislating their own perks, they will feel more beholden to protect Social Security.

Ralph Nader: Well, first of all, some of these disclosures are already in the press. For example, Congressman John Conyers had a matter settled with taxpayer money paid to the woman who filed the

grievance. So the answer to the question is two-fold 1) ask your member Congress to ask the House Ethics Committee to put out a complete list of all the settlements--secret settlements paid to women who complained about being sexually abused or assaulted. They have them. Some of them have already been put out. I'm not aware that they've all been put out. So I think your member of Congress, when you make that kind of request, is going to respond and get the House Ethics Committee to do so.

So some of it is you can just go to a search engine and put in the right words and find some of the members of Congress whose settlements were paid by the taxpayer--imagine that--will be public and you can go from there. The second, yeah, I've always said that we should demand a simple bill that says all benefits that members of Congress have given to themselves--pensions, health insurance, you name it--must be given to all American people. If they're not, then they don't get it in Congress. And so if they don't provide the kind of pensions they're getting to the American people, then they don't get the pension. And I think Tammy is right, if the members of Congress are forced by the voters to be part of the risk, they'll be part of the solution.

And they will defend Social Security to the hilt. Now, the Democrats do defend Social Security; it's the Republicans that are real problem, trying to privatize it--put it in stocks and make the brokers rich, restrain the benefits. They can never get around Franklin Delano Roosevelt's Social Security. They have never gotten over that.

Steve Skrovan: Well, thank you for that question, Tammy. This next question is kind of unusual. It's from listener, Sharon Henning and she says, Ralph, I was wondering if you could suggest good companies that would be worth working for. I love working, I would like to give my time to the companies that are worthy of my time.

Ralph Nader: Well, Sharon, that's a question easily answered. I would, for example, recommend Patagonia near Santa Barbara that has great worker relations, great environmental record. They put out outdoor clothing and equipment, some of the best in the world. And the head of it, Yvon Chouinard has written a book called The Responsible Company, which really is authentic, not just a bunch of clichés. And then there's Interface Corporation in Atlanta, which was turned around by the late Ray Anderson, great CEO. They are moving toward 100% recycling of their tile carpet business, are very environmentally oriented and proselytize other corporations around the country. And for a bigger list, go to the website for Social Venture Network. Those are all the companies, midsize, some of them still run by their founders, you know, there were Ben & Jerry's, Esprit, companies like that. Ben & Jerry's were by Unilever, but you can go to that website and see when their annual convention is and get their materials. There are probably well over 100 companies on that list.

Steve Skrovan: Well, very good. Thank you for that question, Sharon. This next question comes from a listener, Karen McArthur and it's pretty germane to what we were just talking about earlier and the upcoming midterms. Karen says, I'm concerned that people displaced after a natural disaster are unable to vote in elections. While this may seem like a low priority following what happened to the Florida Panhandle, it is an important issue and the implications can be felt outside the state. What can be done at a national level to ensure people are able to vote if their precincts have been destroyed or if they have been temporarily displaced to another location on November 6th. These natural disasters will keep coming and we should be prepared.

Ralph Nader: Karen McArthur, talk about a question--didn't even occur to me, Steve.

Steve Skrovan: Yeah.

Ralph Nader: Wow. This is important. Contact the Federal Elections Commission in Washington. They're supposed to be relevant on this, ask them what's being done about it. Are they expanding absentee voting through the mail? Are they bringing portable precincts to replace the ones that were destroyed? This could turn that election for the US Senate in Florida, which could have consequences for who controls the Senate. Also contact Senator Ben Nelson's campaign office and ask what they're doing about it, because they've got to be aware of it. People up north who haven't had these hurricanes recently be so destructive are not aware of that. And this is going to happen again and again and especially coming out of the gulf in the Atlantic and the southern section of the US.

Steve Skrovan: Thank you for that question, Karen. You actually thought of something Ralph has not thought of before. That is very rare. Very good question, Karen. Thank you for your questions and I also want to thank our guest today, Michael Lighty, who is on sabbatical from National Nurses United and he is campaigning around the country for Medicare For All. For those of you listening on the radio, that's our show. For you podcast listeners, stay tuned for some bonus material, we call the Wrap-up. A transcript of this show will appear on the Ralph Nader Radio Hour website. For Ralph's weekly column, it's free, go to nader.org. For more from Russell Mohkiber, go to corporatereporter.com and laugh yourself serious with Ralph's new book, HOW THE RATS RE-FORMED THE CONGRESS.

Check out the episode we did on three weeks ago and how we need to organize in every congressional district. To acquire a copy, go to ratsreformcongress.org. The producers of the Ralph Nader Radio Hour, are Jimmy Lee Wirt and Matthew Marran. Our Executive Producer is Alan Minsky. Our theme music, Stand Up, Rise Up was written and performed by Kemp Harris; our proofreader is Elisabeth Solomon. Join us next week for another provocative show on the Ralph Nader Radio Hour. Talk to you then, Ralph.

Ralph Nader: Thank you very much, Steve. Readers think, thinkers read and are more likely to act. Spread the word with your friends and neighbors.