

RALPH NADER RADIO HOUR EP 256 TRANSCRIPT

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

Ralph Nader: Hi.

Steve Skrovan: David Feldman is out with the flu today; I guess he's a victim of the big cold snap you guys are having out there. At the top of the show today, we are going to talk about something a little less abstract than we usually do. We're going to be talking to Dr. George Denniston. He is the Founder of Doctors Opposing Circumcision, whose mission it is and I quote, "To eradicate the unethical and unnecessary practice of partial penile amputation of children not only because of the harm that it has done to millions of American boys and men, but also because it has damaged the reputation of the medical profession." Dr. Denniston is a Princeton classmate of Ralph's. And we look forward to his insights into something most of us take for granted but has big cultural, religious and medical implications.

We're also going to be talking about how the Trump administration continues to let corporate crime flourish. We're going to hear from Public Citizen's Rick Claypool, Co-Author of a study, that tracks the enforcement of corporate crime by the Department of Justice. Here's a hint. It's not the same zero tolerance policy, the administration brings the border crossings and street crime and not to pile on to the poor multinational corporate behemoth, but as always, we will give way for another minute to get our weekly report from our regular Corporate Crime Reporter, Russell Mokhiber. And if we have any time left over, Ralph will answer some listener questions. But first, let's go to the doctor. Dr. George C. Denniston is the Founder and President of Doctors Opposing Circumcision. He is a graduate of Princeton University, the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine and the Harvard School of Public Health, as well as being a former Associate Medical Director of the Planned Parenthood Federation of America. A retired professor in the Department of Family Medicine at the University of Washington, Dr. Denniston founded Doctors Opposing Circumcision in 1995. Welcome to the Ralph Nader Radio Hour, Dr. George Denniston.

George Denniston: Thank you.

Ralph Nader: Thank you, George. I can call you George because you are my classmate in the Princeton Class of 1955.

George Denniston: That's correct, Ralph. Yeah. And this morning I woke up early and I thought of you waking up in Ethiopia of many years ago and realizing you had missed a talk with Haile Selassie.

Ralph Nader: You have good memory.

George Denniston: Wondering how you felt about that?

Ralph Nader: I took the next plane out. Anyhow, I want to put this in context, and then I'm going to go through all of the myths that you have rebutted and your core of doctors around the country and the world have rebutted, so the people who aren't very familiar with this can begin to grapple with it. And one reason they're not familiar with the myths is because only the United States circumcises infants

routinely for non-religious reasons--only the United States. The medical societies in Western Europe and elsewhere are against it. We'll get into more detail. And I want to quote from one of your fact sheets. "Just like some cultures cut the genitals of girls, circumcision is our culture's genital-cutting practice. All the things you might think you know about circumcision: that it's necessary, it's cleaner, it's healthier, everyone does it, you should match his dad and the like are only cultural myths, not facts. These myths have no scientific basis but have been blindly passed down from the sexually repressive pre-germ theory medicine of the 19th Century." So, with that background, let's start with the myths. And I'm sure many of our listeners are familiar with the arguments that are given for circumcision, which you call myths. So here is the first one. Myth number one, everyone circumcises. What are the facts?

George Denniston: Well, about 85% of the world, at least 85% of the world is not circumcised.

Ralph Nader: And myth number two, the foreskin is just a piece of skin.

George Denniston: It turns out that the foreskin, it was only discovered in 1996, just very recently that the foreskin has ridged bands which have all the Miessner's corpuscles in it which are the same things you have in your lips and then the tips of your fingers, which are for sensitive touch and so, this is the highest sensitive part of your penis.

Ralph Nader: Myth number three, the foreskin is dirty, prone to disease and hard to take care of it; get rid of it.

George Denniston: That's not a sufficient reason for removing a vital part of the body which protects the glans from being an external organ.

Ralph Nader: And you say the foreskin is a normal healthy body part, no more prone to disease or problems than any other body part and it's well-designed to protect itself. The occasional foreskin problem can be easily treated without surgery. Care of the foreskin is simple. Myth number four, circumcision makes no difference in sex.

George Denniston: Well, that's something of course those who favor circumcision want to deny violently, but the fact is that men who are circumcised can never know what normal sex is like. It's that bad. That is in fact, perhaps the most important reason why doctors have absolutely no right to be doing this. Doctors are unsafe at any speed.

Ralph Nader: Myth number six, circumcision is just a painless little snip. The boys will get over it.

George Denniston: Amazingly, doctors operate on little infants without any anesthesia most of the time and they cut off this highly sensitive, highly nerve-ending piece of tissue without any anesthesia and the child, the infant, often goes into a coma from this. It's that serious. So, it's torture by definition, even if it's not intended as torture, if you hurt somebody like that, that's torture.

Ralph Nader: Myth number seven, circumcision is safe and harmless, talk about the surgical complications as well.

George Denniston: Well, doctors not only torture and mutilate the patient but they psychologically harm the person for life. And I mean, I've had thousands of men tell me that. So, there's no question about it.

Ralph Nader: They don't see this coming forward, though, do they?

George Denniston: Well, they're on the internet. They're all over the place. There's restoration; do you know about restoration? Tens of thousands of men are trying to restore what's left of the skin on their penis. They're trying to stretch it to cover the glans. And this is a very tedious and time-consuming and unpleasant process that men are going through because doctors have unwittingly taken off a normal body part.

Ralph Nader: You talk about breastfeeding in this concept. Can you elaborate that?

George Denniston: Well, yes. Often, it's recognized that breastfeeding is disrupted by the circumcision. In other words, the child no longer trusts the mother so it makes it very hard for breastfeeding to work. And there are lots of other things that can disrupt breastfeeding, but that's certainly one of them.

Ralph Nader: The next myth is circumcision is medically beneficial.

George Denniston: There is no benefit that comes close to leaving it alone.

Ralph Nader: And you say no medical organization in the world recommends routine infant circumcision?

George Denniston: That's correct.

Ralph Nader: How about the American Academy of Pediatrics?

Ralph Nader: Well, they waffle about it because they're afraid of getting sued. But they say there's not enough evidence to testify routine circumcision.

Ralph Nader: Why are they afraid of getting sued?

George Denniston: Well, because there [could] easily be a class action suit to sue them, but it hasn't happened yet. But we believe that fraud is a slam dunk. We believe that doctors who do this are committing fraud. And fraud is not easy to prove legally, as you well know.

Ralph Nader: George, we're going to get to this in a second on the consent form that parents are asked to sign.

George Denniston: Oh, okay.

Ralph Nader: You say, circumcision is neither necessary nor guaranteed to prevent any disease. A person's behavior is always going to be more important in preventing disease than whether or not he has a foreskin. So, the next myth is a boy should look like a circumcised father or friends.

George Denniston: Well, a father said this once. He said, "the hardest part about not circumcising my son was that I had to live my life realizing that I was one of the walking wounded". So, there's this tremendous need for men who are circumcised to not want to feel that way. And so they, sometimes, circumcise their sons.

Ralph Nader: The next myth is, this is going to be objected too, I'm sure, by some people. Circumcision should be the parents' choice. What's the ethical response to that?

George Denniston: Actually, we now are quite clear that parents do not have the ethical right to make a decision for their child that is harmful. They're in denial about the harm when they were making these

decisions but now it's clear that it is harmful. And so they no longer have the ethical right to make that decision for their child.

Ralph Nader: Is that been litigated at all?

George Denniston: Not to my knowledge. I'm not specific but I don't know. There may be some cases that I don't know about.

Ralph Nader: There's also another aspect that I don't see in your information materials, although I haven't read them all, I'm sure on the website. By the way, listeners, the website is doctorsopposingcircumcision.org. That's doctorsopposingcircumcision.org. Aren't there claims being made that there's a higher rate of disease that's communicative to the female in intercourse by a non-circumcised male?

George Denniston: Yes. I guess there are some claims made, but there's no proof of that that I'm aware of.

Ralph Nader: Then why do they keep talking about it? Because when you back up people who favor circumcision, they want to bring the gender thing in, that it's a communicative disease increase.

George Denniston: Well, I mean they're desperate to keep this thing going. What we're dealing with here is a situation where the doctors are under a compulsion. They're under compulsion to do this because they have been harmed themselves. They can't seem to let it alone. That's why I think that the only way to treat this is to get a law against it. That's the only thing they're going to listen to.

Ralph Nader: What percentage of doctors, male doctors, you think had been circumcised?

George Denniston: That's a good question. I have no idea. But what I do believe is that there literally are doctors who go into medicine because they've been circumcised. It's subconscious, but they go into medicine because they want to be able to get revenge.

Ralph Nader: Is that a supposition in your widespread years of practice or is it ...

George Denniston: Yes, yes. Yeah. That's correct.

Ralph Nader: What percent of the male population in United States is circumcised? And is the number going down or up?

George Denniston: Okay, well. I don't have the latest figures on this because it's changing rapidly as people get older. But not too many years ago, it was only about 50-50, because a lot of people, like myself, who are born in the '30s were not circumcised. So, it became widespread after the Second World War, but the numbers were never more than 50-50. They might be now but they weren't then.

Ralph Nader: What about the role of religion here? Circumcision is a practice under Islam and Judaism, isn't that correct?

George Denniston: Yes, it is. And it's interesting that you bring that up because take Judaism for examples, even Jews think it's essential to be circumcised if you're Jewish but it's not. There's a website called celebrantsofbritshalom.org which has hundreds of Rabbis on it who will do the ceremony without the cutting. So, if Rabbis in the hundreds are willing to do a ceremony and not cut the foreskin, then it

must not be that important a religious requirement. And in fact any intact Jew is free to have all of the ceremonies that any other Jew has in the Synagogue.

Ralph Nader: What percentage of Jews and Muslims you think? Is there any data of circumcised around the world?

George Denniston: No. I don't. But, no. I'd say that most Jews are circumcised. As far as Muslims are concerned, I think there are patches of Muslims, different countries where they don't it nearly as much as in other countries. But I have no data on that.

Ralph Nader: Now, circumcision is surgery. So how can members of the clergy engage in circumcision without a license to practice medicine?

George Denniston: That's a very good question.

Ralph Nader: Are they exempted under the law?

George Denniston: You know, the Rabbis, they're called moils, as Rabbis, you have to be a Rabbi and then you become a moil and you can do tens of thousands of circumcisions and they probably do them quite carefully. But I don't know the laws. It seems that you can do it because it's a religious rite.

Ralph Nader: Now tell us about the consent form, that doctors and hospitals require parents bringing their infant sons for circumcision, have to sign.

George Denniston: Well, what do you want to know about it?

Ralph Nader: You point out quite properly that unless the proxy consent discloses every known medical risk in loss and suggests an alternative conservative form of care, it may expose the doctor to a tort lawsuit.

George Denniston: Well, that's right and it should because I think it is fair to say that virtually all circumcisions are done with inadequate informed consent. In fact, of course, totally inadequate in the sense that the individual who is being circumcised cannot sign a document as an infant. So, they're not involved at all. There is no informed consent to the individual.

Ralph Nader: So, right now, what is the fine print? Do they talk about medical risk and loss on the fine print?

George Denniston: Well, there may be some of that in a hospital form, but I'll tell you what, I mean; as far as I'm concerned, usually the woman is often still under the effects of anesthesia after child birth when the doctor comes in and says, "have your son circumcised" and they don't discuss it at all. She says either yes or no. If she says no, they try to persuade her otherwise.

Ralph Nader: Dr. Denniston, most of them are conducted immediately after birth or a few days?

George Denniston: Yeah. Within the first day or two because of the -- they have to leave the hospital. And these days, they're not leaving the hospital within 24 to 48 hours after birth.

Ralph Nader: In your material, you say medicalized circumcision in US started in 1870 as an anti-masturbation punishment for teenagers, invented by doctors and has yet to be proven as an effective health measure. Any of that lingering today?

George Denniston: Well, I hope not. The doctors incidentally were not Jews. They were not Jewish doctors. They were head of the AMA is in fact was one of them, Lewis Sayre. They had all kinds of crazy ideas about what masturbation caused, but not of that has been proven to be correct.

Ralph Nader: And what kind of complications, what's the data on adverse complications following circumcision?

George Denniston: Okay. I would suggest that circumcision has 100% complication rate because the individual has a normal part of their body removed in every case, but there are four pages of complications from circumcision that we have amassed and that are in a paper by Dr. Van Howe.

Ralph Nader: I take it they're on the website, doctorsopposingcircumcision.org?

George Denniston: A lot of them are. Yes.

Ralph Nader: What about this quote that you have heard from your colleagues in the medical profession, "I don't believe in it but the parents insisted"?

George Denniston: Where else in medicine does a doctor let a parent tell him/[her] whether or not to operate? It's the doctor's duty; spent 20 years in studying and so on and it's his/[her] responsibility to decide whether or not to operate.

Ralph Nader: And how widespread is that excuse?

George Denniston: I don't know but I mean, pediatricians essentially, they don't complain when an obstetrician circumcises their patient because they know that if they do, [s]/he won't send him/[her] any more patients.

Ralph Nader: Well, how about this other statement by physicians about the little boy? He had congenital phimosis and adhesions, so we have to do it.

George Denniston: You know what congenital phimosis it? It's a normal thing. It's the way that the thing is attached. The foreskin is attached to the glans at birth in most cases, and that's normal. They're putting a name on it and using it as an excuse to circumcise and it's even in the code so they get paid for it. But what they're doing is, dealing with a normal situation. It's only later that the foreskin separates naturally from the glans and becomes retractable. And by the way, may I add one the thing and that is that the Doctors Opposing Circumcision is about to start a big campaign called, Doctors Against Forcible Retraction because many doctors in this country forcibly retract the foreskin of the infant at the well-baby visit. And that tears; it's just like skinning an animal alive. You pull a foreskin back and it tears it off. And this of course damages things so it makes it more likely that they'll be able to do a circumcision later. And we're putting on this huge campaign to make people aware. The American Academy of Pediatrics is against this but they haven't enforced it.

Ralph Nader: You know what's interesting is, I read the health science sections of the Washington Post, New York Times and it's very rare that you get anybody candidly advising readers or on TV and radio-- listeners and viewers--what we're just talking about. Is there kind of a self-censorship that operates here with the mass media and healthcare columnists?

George Denniston: Well, I can't explain that except to say that so many people have been circumcised in this country and their wives are also sympathetic maybe or at lease unwilling to talk about it. But they

don't want to admit that they've been harmed and yet I am quite convinced that if you really get to a person who has been circumcised, there can be volcanic anger about this. I've seen it, but most of the time they're in total denial and they don't want to expose themselves because they're afraid of that anger. It's an outrage. It's a total outrage.

Ralph Nader: There is a kind of conspiracy of silence here, wouldn't you say?

George Denniston: Well, perhaps but I mean it seems to us that this is changing. And the millennials are all very smart about this. They at least, they are looking into it and when they look into it on the internet, 90% of the websites are against circumcision. And so we're winning the battle of awareness.

Ralph Nader: Do you think there's an economic incentive in the hospitals they add to the bill?

George Denniston: No question about it. No question about it. It's a huge incentive.

Ralph Nader: And what do they charge?

George Denniston: One doctor can make \$35,000 a year doing circumcisions.

Ralph Nader: And what is the circumcision cost?

George Denniston: It varies, between \$100 to \$300, in that range. But then you know what else is going on is that, that they don't do it well and there are urologists who spend their lives repairing botched circumcisions. I know some personally.

Ralph Nader: Before I ask Steve to pitch in here, briefly, George, what is the position of the American Medical Association and the American College of Surgeons?

George Denniston: They're not against it at this point.

Ralph Nader: They're just neutral?

George Denniston: Yeah. I haven't read it for a while but as far as I know they haven't changed from being not saying much about it.

Ralph Nader: Now, compare this with other countries, the Canadian Pediatric Society does not recommend the routine circumcision of every newborn male and they say it further states that when medical necessity is not established, intervention should be deferred until the individual concerned is able to make their own choices. The Royal Dutch Medical Association, the Royal Australian College of Physicians, the British Medical Association, the German Association of Pediatricians--they're all very wary of this and varying degrees. It's only in the United States where you have some organized medical society saying, it's okay and it perpetuates some of these myths. Are they beginning to back down on this in the United States--the medical societies?

George Denniston: Well, let's hope so. But I don't see much evidence of it yet. I think that we're going to have to sue somebody and we're working on that right now.

Ralph Nader: You say in one of your information pages, you say, "Circumcision places the child at known surgical risks. The principal risks of circumcision are pain, hemorrhage, infection and surgical accident potentially leading to mutilation." What are some of the worse cases?

George Denniston: And death.

Ralph Nader: And death. Yes, you say death from severe loss of blood or from, you say, systemic infection. What are the worst situations you've personally observed?

George Denniston: Well, I've been in expert witness in cases where they've cut off all the skin on the penis. But I could say that as far as blood loss is concerned, this is the crazy thing; these babies are only six pounds, right? So how much blood do you think they have in them? And it's only a few teaspoons of blood that you lose you can die. You can go into shock and then die. So it's crazy. It's crazy. Pediatricians who do this are not really surgically trained. And they do this because this is the one surgical procedure they do. And when they wrap penis up after the thing and it bleeds too much, they don't know what to do. They don't know how to even put on a hemostat to stop the bleeding. And so the baby dies.

Ralph Nader: What a 19th Century vestige this is. Anyway, I guess we're out of time, but we're talking with Dr. George Denniston who is one of the leaders in the world of exposing the hazards and the lack of necessity of circumcision--routine circumcision. We, as a country seem to be lagging with the rest, most to the rest of the world. And so, listeners, if you'd like more information on this, go to doctorsopposingcircumcision.org. Thank you very much, George, for all your work and your work on many other medical issues as well. You're one of the great doctors of our time.

George Denniston: Well, thank you, Ralph. And may, I just issue a warning to all people who are planning to have children, won't you please look into this issue before you have a child so that you'll be prepared to disagree with your doctor on this issue.

Ralph Nader: That's a very pressured time too, right after birth.

George Denniston: Right. That's why you have to know in advance. Well, you have to know in advance what's you're going to be doing and you have to be adamant about it. I've had women tell a doctor, no, I don't want him do it and they circumcised him anyway. Oh, yeah, and we have lawsuits on that, but that doesn't fix the kid.

Ralph Nader: Steve, do you have any question?

Steve Skrovan: No, just my observation that as I'm trying to sort this out is usually on the show there is a lobbying group or trade association but there's no such thing as big circumcision. So what you're saying here is there is a psychological component possibly a revenge mode of deep down inside doctors and there's a huge cultural component about conforming to the group and there's a huge religious component dating back to Abraham and Isaac. And in some ways, that's harder to overcome than if it was just purely legislation you could pass to stop people from making money off of this.

George Denniston: Money is a big thing but this is more than that. It's in compulsion. If you're circumcised and you have courage, you say, goddamn-it, this should never been to me. And I'm not going to do it to anybody else. And those are my colleagues who are helping to fight this thing. But if you lack courage, you say, "Damn, this was done to me and by God, I'm not going to let anybody else go through life not having this done to them". I should add one other thing, by the way, now that I think about it, there's a research study coming out showing there's a correlation with SIDS, Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, that if you've been circumcised, you have a higher rate of that.

Steve Skrovan: Wow.

George Denniston: That makes sense because it's like the chicken and the egg. The egg opens up and the chicken looks out and he doesn't like what he sees and he closes the egg back up again. The infant comes in to the world, he gets circumcised, he's got trauma and pain and such, and says the hell with this, I'm leaving. That's maybe a way to describe what's going on with it.

Ralph Nader: On the Sudden Infant Death Syndrome?

George Denniston: Yeah, on the Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, right.

Ralph Nader: Well clearly, it's got to a lot more studies to roll back whatever 19th Century inheritance and medical custom that still reigns in our country. It's something that should be more candidly discussed and openly discussed and I would say organized medicine has got some standards they have to lift up here if they're going to reflect what is known around the world and the science on the subject. So, thank you for all your work.

George Denniston: Absolutely. Absolutely, right. Thank you.

Ralph Nader: Thank you for all your work, Dr. George Denniston. Go to doctorsopposingcircumcision.org for more information, if you have additional questions, put it to the people on that website and I'm sure you'll get answers.

George Denniston: Bye. Thank you. Thanks very much.

Steve Skrovan: We've been speaking with Dr. George Denniston, Founder of Doctors Opposing Circumcision. We will link to that at ralphnaderradiohour.com. Now, we're going to take a short break now. Let's get the latest from our Corporate Crime Reporter, Russell Mokhiber.

Russell Mokhiber: From the National Press Building in Washington DC, this is your Corporate Crime Reporter "Morning Minute" for Friday, February 1, 2019; I'm Russell Mokhiber. Walgreens will pay \$269 million to settle allegations that it knowingly overcharged government healthcare plans. There were two settlements. The first settlement requires Walgreens to pay \$209 million to resolve allegations that it improperly billed Medicare, Medicaid and other federal healthcare programs for hundreds of thousands of insulin pens, it knowingly dispensed to program beneficiaries who did not need them. The second settlement requires Walgreens to pay \$60 million to resolve allegations that it over-billed Medicaid by failing to disclose to and charge Medicaid the lower-drug prices that Walgreens offered the public through a discount program. Over billing and improper billing of Medicare and Medicaid unduly burden taxpayers and put the solvency of these vital healthcare programs at risk, said US Attorney Geoffrey Berman. For the Corporate Crime Reporter, I'm Russell Mokhiber.

Steve Skrovan: Thank you, Russell. Last year we talked with Robert Weissman, President of Public Citizen, about a report they put out tacking how the Trump administration has been enforcing corporate crime. We found out that in the first year, penalties had fallen by 90%, which is not a good thing by the way. Now, in the second year, that number is 94%. It's the only Trump number that's going up. Here to give us some more details on that is our next guest. Rick Claypool is a Research Director for Public Citizen's President's Office, where he focuses on corporate crime and wrongdoing and the ways corporate power distorts democracy. Mr. Claypool produces reports on a range of topics including federal enforcement against corporations, and deregulation under the Trump Administration.

Welcome to the Ralph Nader Radio Hour, Rick Claypool.

Rick Claypool: Thank you, Steve.

Ralph Nader: Welcome, Rick. Before we get into your report, just want to tell our listeners that last year, as Steve said, Public Citizen came out with another citizen group major report on the decline of corporate crime enforcement under Trump. And this is sort of an update of that. And the major media ignored it. Now, here is a president that goes around attacking politicians, calling them weak on crime, meaning street crime, and none of these politicians ever accuse Trump of being really weak on corporate crime--basically so weak that it involves a get-out-of-jail card in effect. And Public Citizen just put out more data about how bad it is, which we're going to discuss. But I notice in today's papers, Rick, the ones I saw, there wasn't any coverage of your report. So, I called Angela Bradbery, your press person, and she said the reporters now want to do their own thing. They don't like to report what citizen groups are putting out the way they did in the '60s and '70s and gave the citizen groups some voice. I was pretty shocked by how blatant these editors and reporters for the big papers are. They want to do their own thing. Well, they're not doing their own thing on this, because they haven't put out a report the way Public Citizen has. So, are you shocked by the lack of coverage of this data? This is data compiled for the first time, publicly.

Rick Claypool: I am. And it's amazing that especially with as many eyes are on the Justice Department right now for, with reason with the Mueller investigation and a number of other actions going on between the acting Attorney General Whitaker and recent Attorney General Jeff Sessions for all that they've done in particular with this heinous, zero tolerance policies against first-time border crossers and street crime--that hypocrisy that is coming out of the Justice Department. And they're bending over backwards to be lenient to corporate criminals and wrongdoers. You would think there would be a story there that people would want to tell.

Ralph Nader: Well, you would think that Democrats would start putting the description, Donald Weak-on-Corporate-Crime Trump—give him a taste of his own medicine. Why don't you tell our listeners some of the categories of corporate crime? The drug companies, the oil companies, the banks--so they can get a more specific idea of the constituent parts of what clearly has been a corporate crime wave in this country with very few sheriffs in pursuit of the crooks.

Rick Claypool: The whole range of corporate offenses that we're looking at, I mean, there's the poisoning of our air and water, there is consumer rip-off, there is exploiting workers, there is the ransacking of our economy, the biggest version or example of which is the financial crisis just 10 years ago. And of course drug companies taking advantage of suffering patients in all number of ways, including what I think is one of the most heinous things happening right now which is what the opioid industry is doing. I think I saw just recently that more people are killed every day due to opioid overdoses now than car crashes. And that the companies were not held accountable to the degree that they should have been years ago and now this is still coming back to haunt us and having devastating impacts on the community all over America.

Ralph Nader: Well, but, Rick, it can be seen everywhere from New York's Wall Street to Detroit's auto industry, the crimes of General Motors, and the conditions which for example defects that aren't recalled all the way to Houston, the big oil company spills that are illegal, violating the Water Pollution Control Act. It's all over. You have the payday loan rackets. And do you have idea, before we get into the details of how the criminal fines have declined under Trump, of the budgets in the Justice Department? How many prosecutors on criminal corporate crime do they have? How many investigators? They're

very tight on telling the American people that there are very, very small corporate crime prosecution budgets. Do you have any illumination on that for us?

Rick Claypool: I don't have illumination on that. What I do have been keeping an eye on are some of the track reports coming out of Syracuse University. And they have noted that looking at how much this obsession with the immigration enforcement has distorted Justice Department enforcement. It's at the point now where in Border States only 6% of all the cases that prosecutors are working on are not immigration related. So, that corporate and white crime are a sliver of that 6% where everything else is being focused on prosecuting first-time border crossers.

Ralph Nader: In other words, the government and Congress is implicated in this--Republican and Democrat--they're going very cheap on budgets to stamp out "crime in the suites". And before, again, we get into your figures here, which are quite shocking, do you have any hope that in the coming presidential campaign where there's probably going to be 20 candidates for the Democratic nomination; do you have any hopes that some of them are going to make, getting tough on corporate crime and elaborating it--how it impacts people's lives every day health, safety, economic well-being, blocking them from access to justice? Do you think anyone is going to make a big issue of this? Even Bernie Sanders didn't say that much about it in 2016. What's your guess?

Rick Claypool: Yeah, I definitely have some hopes for Senator Sanders on raising this issue. I think even more so, I mean, this time around, I think Senator Elizabeth Warren who has made some central policy proposals about reforming corporate structures and sincere, seriously diminishing the power of the billionaire class with the wealth tax--those kind of things, I think, are going to change the conversation and focus it on that and to the degree to which, there's already anonymous quotes from bankers who are complaining about this conversation happening. So, the more of those complaints that leak out and the more voices that we have talking about that and amplifying that, I think, and the more that that becomes a source of conflict and contrast. It's an obvious contrast with the Trump administration which is corporate to the bone. I think that's going to be something that could break through.

Ralph Nader: Is Public Citizen calling for hearings in the House of Representatives now run by the Democrats? They run the Senate Judiciary committee, Jerry Nadler is the Chair, for example from New York City. And I've just come up with a column where I list 12 congressional hearings; people can get it at nader.org, 12 congressional hearings that are long overdue and number one, is corporate crime, fraud and abuse hearings. Is Public Citizen making a demand on that and have you sent this report to key progressives in Congress?

Rick Claypool: Not yet. I think I need to check in with Congress Watch and see if they can get this to the frontline. I know there are a number of reports that we're putting in front, that we're using to, including the one that you mentioned--the report on severe decline in enforcement. And we're using those to call for hearings. But I'm not privy to those specific conversations.

Ralph Nader: Well, good. Let's get to your report. Show us the decline; even the rather modest levels under the Obama Administration.

Rick Claypool: That's right. We should start out by saying that the levels of the modest Obama Administration are not meant to signify that. If only we were back at that level, then you know all of the well and good with the world; the decline in the number of cases and the decline in penalties is mainly

to show that we were already in a place where corporate enforcement was not particularly strong and we're only going further in the wrong direction. So the number of cases we're talking about, comparing the last two years of the Obama Administration, you had 502 cases in 2015 and 308 in 2016. In each of those years, penalties were in the neighborhood of \$50 billion. You move in to Trump's first year, that is where there was just a cataclysmic decline where you went from the \$50 billion in penalties to not even \$5 billion. And that's the 90% decline in penalties that we're talking about. The number of cases against corporate offenders declined from 308 in the last year of Obama to 241 in that first year of Trump. Now, looking back at 2018, and we're sort of using 2018 as a rough measure because we're talking about the full year of the presidency. So, it's really Trump's second year or January 20th, 2018 to January 19th, 2019. The number of cases declined again down to 227 cases against corporate offenders. Now, the number of penalties did go up to \$15 billion. That's still quite tiny compared to the \$50 billion of the Obama Administration. And it's worth noting that 60% of that \$15 billion in penalties comes from four cases against big banks that are holdovers from the Obama Administration. And in all four cases, the financial analysts remarked on how the penalties were actually smaller than expected, particular looking the penalty against the Royal Bank of Scotland, which was expected to be in the neighborhood of \$12 billion was more like \$4.9 billion.

Ralph Nader: That's why the corporate lawyers get their big fees, because they drive that down in their negotiation with the Justice Department. Well, most people know about the Wells Fargo crimes--selling without notice to their customers auto insurance, credit card services. Imagine, they don't even say, do you want it? They just set it up and we're talking about well over a million customers. Is it correct to say that although Wells Fargo had to pay civil penalties in there and civil lawsuits, et cetera? There hasn't been a corporate prosecution initiated by the Justice Department against Wells Fargo?

Rick Claypool: That's right. They paid civil penalties from the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau and the OCC [Office of the Comptroller of the Currency]. It seems like that was a begrudgingly done and only after, I think there was some public outside pressure where it was just going to be too egregious for them to not enforce against Wells Fargo. That said, even that settlement, so much of it was handed over to Wells Fargo about how to administer and how to conduct the consumer relief that it was shocking where it should be the consumer protection agency's job to make sure that people are being paid back fairly, you know, not the wrongdoer in the first place.

Ralph Nader: Right. And this is one of the most pre-meditated crimes, corporate crimes in history. I mean, they planned it, there were hundreds of Wells Fargo Bank employees. They put them on quotas; some of them were fired if they didn't meet their quotas of these fake sales. And Elizabeth Warren, she called for the resignation of all the board of directors. Well, the CEO left with a nice golden parachute, but basically the board is largely there except for voluntary resignations or attritions. Tell people how the system is really rigged where they get these settlements with the Justice Department without having to plead guilty.

Rick Claypool: Well, that's right. I mean, that's a whole other problem and that's been going on so that precedes Trump by a lot. That's deferred non-prosecution agreements where the Justice Department prosecutors will negotiate this agreement where companies will mostly agree that the allegations against them happened. And they will have to pay a penalty but they'll never have to plead guilty. And after these agreements, they have a certain term, usually two or three years and then supposedly the companies are being watched by corporate monitors. And they have to meet certain compliance

standards in order to be released including that usually means they're not supposed to be breaking the law anymore even though many do. And what happens is, these companies, they get these deferred or non-prosecution agreements again and again. And they have no record and there is no way to hold them fully accountable, that they're sort of backing down from what they should be doing, which is if they have a sufficient evidence to prosecute and to find the company guilty, well, then that's what they should do. But the Justice Department has become terrified just of the concept of prosecuting many big corporations largely because of the fallout from the Arthur Anderson case, which has been...the story of it has been so distorted and elaborated on over time that it has become this legend that if you prosecute a company, it's going to necessarily collapse. And you're going to be ...

Steve Skrovan: That's what happened with Arthur Anderson? It collapsed?

Rick Claypool: It collapsed but the circumstances of its collapse were unique to Arthur Anderson.

Ralph Nader: As the Corporate Crime Reporter, Russell Mokhiber has pointed out, what's wrong with capital punishment for criminally recidivist corporations? They should have their charter pulled and the company board of directors replaced, the bosses fired and trusteeship taken to place the corporation--to put it on a law and order compliance pathway. I mean, we've got to get away from this kind of argument like you say. We're talking to Rick Claypool who is the prime author of this report by Public Citizen on the soft-on-crime performance of Donald Trump's Justice Department. Before we close, Rick, Steve, do you have any questions or comments on this report? It's amazing that something like this doesn't get any mass media press. Maybe it isn't amazing. Maybe these corporate crooks are major advertisers including donating to PBS and NPR and of course they're advertising in NBC, CNN, Fox, ABC, CBS. These are major corporations, brand name, banks, drug companies, insurance companies, auto companies, oil companies, credit companies, brokerage companies. What do you say? Are you shocked as I am, Steve?

Steve Skrovan: Yeah. I'm shocked. And you almost answered the question that I was going to ask both you and Rick. I wonder if the candidates you're talking about who are coming out that they're shy about doing this because they're worried about being accused of being anti-business. And if you're anti-business, that's going to hurt the economy. And if you hurt the economy, that's going to hurt people. How do you make the case that this needs to be done and that this "crime in the suites" is more egregious than the supposed crime in the streets?

Ralph Nader: Well, certainly it is; it takes more lives and steals more dollars by far than crime in the streets.

Steve Skrovan: But how do you make that case? Do you have to be just very specific about specific companies and specific crimes or because it seems like these companies are so powerful that people sort of quiver at the idea that one of them could be hurt or come down or what's that kind of cause me of am I going to get fired, am I going to get laid off?

Rick Claypool: So much of it. I think, I mean, these things that are actually illegal, right, I mean that's one part of it and like getting punishing corporations for those things is part of it. But I also think a lot of what people are angry about with the living in a society where you could, every, from where the hospital you're born in to the school that you go to, to the job you work at, to everything else, can be corporate controlled in a way that is perfectly legal. So I think part of it is just the utter corporate dominance of

American life where, yes, they need to be held accountable for the ways that they are, the legal and regulatory violations they're making. But there's also a separate, just they need to be put back in their place as something that is intended to be a tool for people to live a better life. And to the degree that what they're doing is harmful and I mean, the climate change, I mean, your corporate greed literally is maybe going to kill us all. I mean, that's what it comes down to. It seems insurmountable that they have so much power that they could be brought to heel seems even beyond the power of most powerful government in the history of history.

Ralph Nader: Well, I think there's mass public opinion demanding cracking down on corporate crime, fraud and abuse. I mean, they're not massing in the streets, but when they're polled, there are few conservatives not to mention liberals and progressives, who don't want law and order for corporate crooks. I mean, the poll came in over 90% to prosecute the Wall Street crooks 10 years ago that you referred to during the Wall Street thievery, collapse and bailout on the backs of taxpayers. So, the politicians in Congress, they can't say they don't get support back home on things like this. So, I think it's good if Public Citizen and Congress Watch makes this a real priority. You got a foothold now in the House of Representatives; you get some good corporate crime hearings and some of the subcommittees--not just the Judiciary subcommittee. And the press will report congressional hearings; they won't block those out. And then you'll get more candidates talking about it at the national and state level in the coming campaigns and then we'll turn this around. So, unfortunately we're out of time. We've been talking with Rick Claypool, who has put out this latest report for Public Citizen called ***Corporate Impunity Worsens under Trump***. Indeed, Donald Weak-on-Corporate-Crime Trump, has to be called to account. It's not like his business record was clean either. I mean, but he escaped a lot of corporate crime prosecutions, he and his companies. He is always one step ahead as a fugitive from justice in his business career. But tell our listeners before we close, Rick, how they can get this report and present it to their members of Congress.

Rick Claypool: That's right. So, you can find the report that's on Public Citizen's home webpage, citizen.org; it should be one top rotating menu items called ***Corporate Impunity Worsens under Trump: DOJ Penalties for Megabanks and Other Corporate Offenders Drop 80% After Two Years of Trump***. So look for that on citizen.org.

Ralph Nader: Thank you very much, Rick Claypool, and this is a subject to be continued. Let's hope we get some vibrations about this report from Congress and some congressional committees. And listeners, you've got to role too. Just tell 'em, you want law and order, you want public hearings in the House of Representatives--tell Nancy Pelosi; she's in charge now. Thank you again, Rick Claypool.

Rick Claypool: Thank you, Ralph. It's been an honor.

Steve Skrovan: We've been speaking with Rick Claypool of Public Citizen, co-author of the updated report on how they Trump Administration is very, very soft on corporate crime. We will link to that report at ralphnaderradiohour.com. So, Ralph, we've got some time for some listener questions. And this is actually, this first one is from a listener that comes from the comment section of the Ralph Nader Radio Hour website which is another way to reach us, by the way and refers to our interview recently with Professor Shoshana Zuboff and her book, ***The Age of Surveillance Capitalism***, at the end she declared that we can "tame" this type of capitalism just like we've tamed the excesses of the Gilded Age and reformed the economic system in other areas. And listener Afdal Shahansha says, he says this:

"We never tamed capitalism. That is a liberal fantasy. The lesson to be learned from the repeal of the New Deal and corporate coups started in the late '70s is that capitalism cannot be tamed. Why? Because inexorably contained within the system itself are the tools to empower the few. As long as you leave the system of exploitation and extraction of labor value to enrich the employer class at the expense of employees," which she says, is the definition capitalism, "You give them the incentive and the power to undo the very reforms intended to curb that power. We can't afford yet another cycle of crisis, regulation, crisis, war, crisis and deregulation. The world ecosystem simply can't handle it this time. We've reached the breaking point and it's time to move beyond capitalism to a better system."

What do you say to that, Ralph?

Ralph Nader: Well, he's got the diagnosis pretty on square here but what's the better system? The first step is to subordinate corporate capitalism to the power of a popular democracy. And that will restrict the kind of giveaway trade agreements they have, the tax escapes, the corruption of the political process. So, it's a matter of first subordinating that anti-democratic structure of global capitalist giants. We're not talking small business here--just the "Too Big To Fail" corporations like the big banks for example, big drug companies. And that, we've talked about on the program, we've had a lot of issues of where the issue of subordination is key and then the second is we have to have a double standard under the rule of law, that corporations as artificial entities should never have the equal rights of real human beings. Corporations are chartered by state governments. They don't exist unless they are chartered by state governments. Financiers fund corporations; they cannot create them with their privileges and immunities. And these state charters or federal charters, preempting state charters for the big corporations, recommended by William Howard Taft over 100 years ago, by the way, would in effect reduce the constitutional rights that these artificial entities have, and allow real human beings to have greater rights. That means if for example that corporations as corporations, not the people in them, would never be allowed to lobby, they never be allowed to contribute to political campaigns. They simply could not have the rights that human beings have without dominating them. That's why we have to have a double standard—human beings first—corporations become our servants, not our masters.

Steve Skrovan: Very good. Thank you for that comment, Afdal. This next question comes from Shane Canfield who says, "Are you still involved with PIRG? They did some good things. I don't hear about them anymore. Ralph, why don't you tell us a little bit of the history, your history with it? Because I know this, but maybe our listeners don't."

Ralph Nader: PIRG stands for Public Interest Research Groups and they are created by college and university students through a check-off, usually on the tuition bill or through student government. It's a very small one like \$5, \$6, \$7 a year per student. And they hire fulltime advocates, they hire lawyers, they hire scholars, investigators, they hire organizers and they pick environmental and other important issues in their state to lobby or to litigate. For example, in New York State, New York PIRG helped improve for years the New York subway system through a group called Straphangers Group. And the work on prison reform by the Michigan PIRG, it's notable too, and a lot of consumer improvement and legislation. They took on the fraud of standardized testing, multiple choice and they've done a lot and in Massachusetts PIRG, for example on cleaning up drinking-water contamination and other pollution.

And some of the students get course credit for it. And then they got together and they organized a national PIRG, it's called uspig.org. U-S-P-I-R-G dot O-R-G. where you get a big picture of what they're doing all over the country. The press has not given it national visibility, the PIRG movement. They get

local press, they get state press, but for example, the New York Times still hasn't done a feature on NYPIRG, which is arguably the most influential Broadgate Citizen group in New York State in over 30 years. And so the PIRGs need to toot their horn more. They need to get the attention of people who think that college students are all exclusively focused on their vocational studies and on their iPhone and not on their civic responsibilities. It's a great story, a great chapter in American Democracy.

Steve Skrovan: Well, just to continue a little bit on with that, because I know a little bit of this. This was your idea and you sort of kick-started it, but you've never had any official capacity with it. Right?

Ralph Nader: Yes. We helped organized many of the first PIRGs from New York to California and Massachusetts. And I believe in giving the students responsibility. The board of directors are elected by students. And you've got 18, 19, 20-year-olds hiring 24, 26, 28-year-old organizers and consumer advocates, environmental leaders. So it's a very nice model. You'd think, everybody would know about it, but you know my old saying, when you have a decaying culture, the worst is first and the best is last in terms of media visibility. Look at Trump.

Steve Skrovan: Right. And as I understand it, also the inspiration sort of came from all the young people who'd come to work for you in the late '60s and early '70s and it was mainly college students, graduate students and you saw this energy and they always had the summers off. Is that a correct analysis?

Ralph Nader: Yeah. That is. We have far more students wanting to do good works and we had jobs in Washington. So, we said, well, there's plenty of work to do all over the country and there're over 20 PIRGS now. They do door to door canvassing. And where there are not Public Interest Research Groups, they're based on university and college tuition check-offs or student government that just fund themselves by door-to-door canvassing especially working on environmental issues.

Steve Skrovan: Well, very good. Yes, Shane, thank you for that question. Thank you for your questions; keep them coming on the Ralph Nader Radio Hour website. I want to thank our guests again, Dr. George Denniston of Doctors Opposing Circumcision and Rick Claypool from Public Citizen. 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. Join us next week on the Ralph Nader Radio Hour. Talk to you then, Ralph.

Ralph Nader: Thanks so much, Steve and listeners, you might want to read my column on nader.org, ***"Demand Critical Congressional Hearings – Long Overdue, Avoided or Blocked"***. It must be conducted. They've been blocked by the Republicans for years. And I bet you more than one of them will hit home with you. Check it out.