

RALPH NADER RADIO HOUR EP 273 TRANSCRIPT

Steve Skrovan: Welcome to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*, my name is Steve Skrovan, along with my returning co-host David Feldman, welcome back, David.

David Feldman: It is an honor to be back.

Steve Skrovan: It's good to have you back. And we have the man of the hour too, of course, Ralph Nader. Hello, Ralph.

Ralph Nader: Hey, how are you? This is going to be a titanic issue to 2020 elections.

Steve Skrovan: Yes, we hope it is. And what Ralph is referring to is we've got a couple of doctors on the program today. One is an MD, the other is Ph.D. And first up is Dr. John Geyman. He is back with us to discuss healthcare. Regular listeners remember Dr. Geyman as an advocate for Medicare for All; he has done a deep analysis of Obamacare vs. Medicare for All as well as the Republican alternative, whatever that turns out to be, and I'm going to give him credit for coining the term Trumpcare. Trump, I think owns the healthcare system now and he likes to talk about how people don't want to give up their "beloved private health insurance." And I believe it's the first time the word beloved, has ever been used to describe private health insurance. And of course, this is the same guy who said, you know, who said, "who knew healthcare was so complicated". He said that after taking office by the way, so Dr. Geyman's new book is entitled, *Struggling and Dying Under Trumpcare: How We Can Fix This Fiasco*, that's the first half of the show and the second half of the show we turn our attention to the art of persuasion. We welcome Dr. Ben Burgis, who is the author of a book entitled, *Give Them An Argument: Logic For The Left*. It's sort of a handbook on how we take apart the logic of the right and David you've actually read this and talked to Dr. Burgis, right?

David Feldman: Yes, it's really interesting because a lot of people on our side don't know how to fight back. We kind of just listen and then walk away so it's very valuable information.

Steve Skrovan: And in between, we're going to break up our two doctors with a man who should get own doctorate in exposing corporate crime, our *Corporate Crime Reporter*, Russell Mokhiber. And you podcast listeners won't want to miss this week's Wrap Up; we're going to talk to David Helvar, the head of Blue Frontier, the advocacy group for ocean conservation. He has a new proposal called "Putting the Blue in the Green New Deal." So, we'll get to that in the Wrap Up, but first, let's talk about how we can fix the fiasco of Trumpcare, David.

David Feldman: John Geyman is an MD and Professor Emeritus of Family Medicine at the University of Washington School of Medicine in Seattle. As a family physician with 21 years in academic medicine, he has also practiced in rural communities for 13 years. Dr. Geyman has served as president of Physicians for a National Health Program and as a member of the National Academy of Medicine. His new book is entitled *Struggling and Dying Under Trumpcare: How We Can Fix This Fiasco*. Welcome back to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*, Dr. John Geyman.

John Geyman: Well thank you. I'm glad to be here. Thank you for inviting me.

Ralph Nader: Welcome again, John. Seems like we're old friends now with so many interviews and my promotion of your various books, which are very-very clearly written listeners, and you're well advised to read these books because this is going to be the big issue in the 2020 presidential and congressional campaigns. Are we going to continue the present corrupt, constant denying, profiteering, cruel, inefficient healthcare industry system? Or are we going to have a simpler, more efficient single-payer system with free choice of doctor and hospital, no networks, and of course, better outcomes as a result? So let me start with the big deception here, because there are some people who don't like to use the phrase Medicare for All, because of the sabotage of Medicare by the Republicans and Democrats in allowing more and more of Medicare recipients to be seduced and deceived into what's called Medicare Advantage Programs--what I call Medicare disadvantage. We now have one out of three elderly people under Medicare drawn in by these deceptive promotional lunches, that the health insurance companies have all over the country, where they have presentations that should be prosecuted by the Federal Trade Commission, they are so deceptive. In your book on page 21, you have a pretty devastating summary of why people over 65 should stay clear and just go into traditional Medicare, not go into Medicare so-called Advantage. Can you tell our listeners why they should avoid Medicare "Disadvantage," as I call it?

John Geyman: Well, I agree it is a Medicare "Disadvantage." And they have all kinds of deceptive marketing approaches, as you mentioned Ralph, including one that isn't talked about much, but they have these marketing pitches on second and third floors of places without elevators, so they can pick out people that can handle stairs; they're always trying to get healthier people and make as much money from them as possible, meanwhile limiting; they have restrictive networks that change all the time. Even docs can't keep up with the latest changes. Sometimes a doc doesn't even know if he's in or out of network; they can change so rapidly and all these pre-authorizations and now it's just a total rip. It's an example of why we don't need the private, multi-payer insurance industry anymore. It's ripped us off for a huge number of years, not just privatized Medicare, but privatized Medicaid. And then overhead of these private insurers runs about six times what traditional Original Medicare is of about 2.5%. So, this huge overhead and right now what we're seeing is the private insurers, more and more fighting back for their expanded place in healthcare, including buying up more and more physician groups so they can run them, etc.

Ralph Nader: It's a corporate takeover. I don't use the word privatized, John; I use the word corporatized. So basically, Medicare, so-called Advantage is a corporate takeover and all the abuses that people who are under 65 are exposed to it by health insurance companies operated here. They deny benefits, they're wasteful. They require you to go only to a certain network of doctors and hospitals, even though they may not be proper for your ailment. It's what Dr. Fred Hyde in Connecticut once told me about Medicare Disadvantage. He said, "it's not what you pay, it's what you get, or what you don't get. It's what you don't get. Stay with traditional Medicare, even though they require the traditional Medicare patients to subsidize the Medicaid and

Medicare health insurance companies. And just to give you an idea, Centene Corporation--this is in Dr. John Geyman's book, *Struggling and Dying Under Trumpcare: How We Can Fix This Fiasco*, just out and it's also online--the largest private Medicaid insurer in the country, took in 1.1 billion in profits between 2014 and 2016 just in California, "even as its plans were among the worst performing in this state." That's another way of saying they're expert at denying benefits and underpaying what's required, often turning patients away in desperation, and even making more money. Now, you're enthralled by one bill in the House of Representatives and explain that; give the bill number. I think it's fair to say it's the best single-payer bill--better even than John Conyers's bill and Bernie Sanders's bill. And it's supported by a lot of Democrats. So, give the vital statistics about that bill, starting with its number.

John Geyman: This is H.R. 1384. It's in the House. It's expanded and improved Medicare for All [Act of 2019]. It's a great bill, the best we've ever seen. Its two leading co-sponsors are Pramila Jayapal from Seattle [WA] actually and Debbie Dingell from [Dearborn] Michigan. This will bring us a new system of national health insurance for all US residents, based on medical need, not ability to pay, and on a principle that healthcare is not a privilege but a human right. It'll bring right away universal access to healthcare for US residents, full choice of providers and hospitals anywhere in the country, no restrictive networks, covers everything: outpatient-inpatient care, laboratory diagnostic services, dental, hearing and vision care, prescription drugs, reproductive health, including banning the Hyde Amendment so that women can have full reproductive healthcare, maternity, and newborn care; mental health services will be a lot better covered, including substance abuse treatment, and long-term care and support. Some of this is absent in Bernie's Bill in the Senate; quite a bit of what I just said is absent. There's no cost-sharing, such as co-pays and deductibles in the House Bill. They'll negotiate drug prices, as the VA does, and has for years, to get to get prices down to about 58% of what we pay. It'll be huge administrative simplification with negotiated fee schedules for physicians and other health professionals who will remain in private practice; global budgeting of individual hospitals and other facilities, and bulk purchasing of drugs and medical devices too. That's a big deal, the medical devices, if you had a hip replacement, you know that the cost, that can vary a lot wherever you are in the country. The House Bill will eliminate the private health insurance industry with its administrative overhead and profiteering, and no longer need for employer-sponsored health insurance. Cost savings, we've got two great studies we can talk about later if we need to, that enable universal coverage through a not-for-profit, single-payer financing system. Two great studies, as I said, one just six months ago—two-year transition period actually for the House Bill. One year after enactment, people over 55 will be so covered and under 19; after two years, everyone's covered. Shared risk for the cost of illnesses and accidents across the whole population of 326 million. So, it is really a good bill; 70% of Americans support it, including 85% of Democrats and 52% of Republicans.

Ralph Nader: And I might add, when people have access to health insurance, they don't postpone needed healthcare, which either ends up destroying their lives or disabling them, losing their jobs, or they inflict even more costs on the healthcare system and Medicaid, etc., because they didn't have the money to afford health insurance under the present system to get diagnosed and treated in time. So, where the present system has this perverse incentive of feeding on its own waste and rejection, this system goes in the opposite direction; it catches medical ailments early before the cost becomes 10 or 100 times more, as the ailment becomes more and more serious, whether it's respiratory disease, cancer, or what have you. You know, when I hear you

say all this John, my first reaction is why in the world, this is the USA, the last western country, years and years, it doesn't have universal health insurance. All other countries--Iceland, Luxembourg, Italy, Germany, France, England, Canada, Taiwan, Japan--you know, it's not just Western countries, and we know it's because when Lyndon Johnson had a chance to go for Medicare for All, the country was spending huge amounts of money in the Vietnam War and there were members of Congress who were saying, President Johnson, "you can't go cover everybody; we can't afford it because the Vietnam War is draining us, and there's inflation. So that's another cost of imperial wars by the way, because as you quote in your book, there was a government study out in 2012, saying 45,000 Americans die every year because they can't afford health insurance and therefore can't get diagnosed and treated in time. Well, that's almost 1,000 people a week and if you multiply that by 40 years, or more, since the end of the Vietnam War, that's over 1.7 million people who could have been saved. So, and the second response I get to this, when I hear you speak, is that the supporters of full Medicare for All--everybody in and nobody out, free choice to doctor and hospital, better outcomes and half the cost per capita--that's the experience in Canada, and unless we think Canadians are a lot smarter than we are, they have modern healthcare; they have the equipment. They come in at half the price per average per capita, and they cover everybody in the country. As you point out in your book, about 30 million people under Obamacare are not covered; it's getting worse and about 80 million people are under-insured and we still spend twice on the average per capita than Canada. But the supporters of S1804, which is that great bill you describe in your book, I submit, don't know how to argue very well for it. They're already put on the defensive by people. Republicans mostly say, "how are you going to pay for it; it's going to be multi-trillion dollars a year". Tell us the many easy ways to pay for a system that once it's in place costs half as much as the system costs today in dollars, and doesn't kill anyone because nobody dies in Canada or France because they can't afford health insurance; they are insured from the moment they're born.

John Geyman: Yeah, that's just one example of the Canadian advantage over us. If you're an auto manufacturer in Toronto, they pay very little compared to what a US car manufacturer has to pay for healthcare for their employees. But yeah, if we bring it down to people and budgets, which we should have a system that cares about people instead of corporate profits and Wall Street investors. But anyhow, the average family of four today with employer-sponsored health insurance, pays \$28,000 a year now.

Ralph Nader: Good heavens, \$28,000 a year.

John Geyman: 28K, but then the median income in the country is something like 59K. So, this is just absurd and if we compare that with national health insurance through Medicare for All, 95% of Americans will pay less in taxes than they do now for insurance and healthcare through a progressive tax plan. I'm going to mention these; we've had two studies, both of which showed huge savings. The Friedman Study of six years ago or so told us we could save \$616 billion a year by going to Medicare for All. That includes \$220 billion through insurance overhead and administration getting rid of that, etc., lots of administrative savings. Then the second study is more recent, and is very well done, the Political Economy Research Institute [PERI] out of the University of Massachusetts in Amherst, this reported out just six months ago, that total health spending will increase from 3.2 trillion to 3.6 trillion due to many people getting care they previously had to forego, but we'll save 5.1 trillion over 10 years through savings from getting rid of the multi payer, profiteering, private insurance industry. So, we have solid numbers and

different ways of progressive taxation. The PERI Study out of Amherst would set business premiums at 8% below what business now pays on healthcare; they would set a sales tax on non-essential goods of 3.75%. They'd put a recurring tax of 0.36% on all wealth over a million, and they would tax long-term capital gains as regular income. So, there's a lot of work that's been done, but the opponents of this are gathering momentum again, like they always do, including hospitals that are saying, "Oh, we might not get paid as much as we are". Well, they'll get paid better, actually. Insurers, of course, are complaining because they'll be going away.

Ralph Nader: They have to be replaced. You can't have a single-payer, government funding, private delivery of healthcare, and still have private health insurers like Aetna, that in one year recently paid its CEO over \$55 million--one year!

John Geyman: Right. They'll have to be replaced. The way I'd like to think of it is, the winners and losers under Medicare for All single-payer. The winners are all Americans, physicians and other health professionals will win, because they'll have much less bureaucracy, they'll have more time to take care of patients. That's why they became such. Hospitals will win; employers will win big time; mental healthcare will win. Mental healthcare is very underfunded; it'll be better reimbursed. Public health will win. Federal and state governments will win and taxpayers will win. The losers are private health insurance, corporate middlemen, corporate stakeholders, privatized Medicare and as you said Disadvantaged Medicare Ralph, privatized Medicaid, displaced workers. Well, there's a plan in the House Bill that allocates 1% of its budget over the first five years for assistance and retraining of workers displaced by the elimination of the private health insurance industry. And that's probably 1.7 million people. So, there are big numbers there.

Ralph Nader: You know, if people are still skeptical, take a look at some of the reports on the pricing of healthcare services in this country--\$3,000 in Berkeley to take someone a mile and a half to a hospital, in an ambulance, 3 thousand bucks! Their operations in the US for \$100,000 per operation that in Canada are done at \$25,000. You have massive billing fraud, minimal estimate this year, 350 billion dollars in the US. That's about what the whole healthcare system in Canada for 33 million people costs; you have far less billing fraud. People don't even see a bill in Canada for the most part, none of the anxiety, the dread, the fear, the insecurity that pervades millions and millions of families in the United States. You can't put dollar figure on that, can you and there are all kinds of ways. You tax corporations, the way they were taxed in the 1960s, that produced hundreds of billions of dollars. They were making a lot of money in the 1960s; 1960s are one of the most prosperous decades, and they're grossly under taxed. A lot of these corporations aren't taxed at all. Fifty-six major corporations in this country paid no federal income tax whatsoever last year, and got rebates, they so gamed the system. For years, General Electric would make billions of US dollar profits, pay no federal income tax. So, the ability to pay is everywhere by just making a more just political economy, having the rich and the multinationals not escape taxation by putting illegally their profits in some little island off the Isle of England, or in Luxembourg or in Ireland. And just amazing that the supporters of this Bill, don't know how to make all the arguments. While I've heard a dozen members of the House support this Bill, they never mention that it would prevent 45,000 deaths a year, and of course, many more injuries and illnesses, because people will be able to afford health care. And they won't be denied because they couldn't afford health insurance to get diagnosed and treated in time. They never mention it! I haven't yet heard anyone mention that it will save hundreds of

billions of dollars in fraud. I haven't heard anyone mention that no longer will the drug companies be pursuing the sky is the limit and hit a patient for \$100,000 or \$150,000 for a year's treatment, when you can get it for 5% of that in Egypt, the exact same drug, because they control prices in Egypt and other countries. What do you think is going on here? The Republicans argue, without the facts forcefully, and they use all the non-factual arguments, the scare tactics, the lies; the Democrats don't use their full panoply; they don't use their full menu of arguments. Therefore, they're on a defensive in the House of Representatives. Why?

John Geyman: Yeah, I want the Dems to stand up. And we do have a progressive wing; there are 107 co-sponsors in the House of Bill--that Jayapal/Dingell Bill. They're a major force; we have to listen to them and some of our enemies are our own Democrats in the center who still take credit for the Affordable Care Act, which has failed after nine years to control prices. It helped for a while with getting people covered, but we still have 30 million uninsured and, 80 million or so underinsured, so it had no price controls, never intended. It pleased this coalition of profiteers, corporate profiteers, but that's not good enough so.

Ralph Nader: I think you touched on the answer to my question.

John Geyman: Yeah.

Ralph Nader: If the Democrats in the House make the full arguments for single-payer full Medicare for All, they are in effect, condemning all the holes and all the escape hatches, and all the profiteering allowed under Obamacare, which is under attack by the Republicans who want to repeal Obamacare. They can't have it both ways. We need a clean sheet here. Too many people's lives, too many people's anxieties, too many people's livelihoods are at stake. Here's another eye-opener, listeners in Dr. Geyman's book. By the way, have you been invited to testify in the House of Representatives? They now are controlled by the Democrats; they've had hearings on single-payer, have they invited you?

John Geyman: No. I have had...

Ralph Nader: You have already written about eight books on the subject, a practicing physician, an academic professor of medicine at a well-regarded medical school in Washington State--why aren't they inviting you? How can they be authentic?

John Geyman: Well, I think we just touched on it, there's too much cowardice politically across the Democratic spectrum. And the centrists are running things more than they should. And that's bad; we've tried incremental little tweaks to the system for years and they don't work.

Ralph Nader: They don't work because the corporate lawyers for the health industry know how to game it.

John Geyman: Right.

Ralph Nader: The corporate industry is ripping off Medicare 60 billion with a "b" a year, listeners. That's your money; they are ripping off Medicaid in the tens of billions of dollars every

year; that's your money. Here's a quote from your book, that ought to open up the eyes of all our listeners whose ears are already open, "the federal government now pays about 60% of total healthcare costs in this country, a much higher figure than most people realize. Much of this has been ongoing subsidies of the private health insurance industry, which receives \$685 billion in government subsidies each year and the Congressional Budget Office projects this number to double in another 10 years." So, they're already spending more of your money than would be necessary to support a single-payer system, which comes in at half the price of what you're paying now under the corporate system and the government subsidy system. So, I think we're not going to get this bill through the House, much less the Senate unless there is a real informed 1% of the people out there, who summon their senators and representatives to town meetings, thrash it all out and send them back with their instructions. Eighty years of dilly-dallying since before Harry Truman was president are enough. Would you agree that we need town meetings back where you are, where your two senators and representatives have to answer up and get educated by you and others?

John Geyman: Absolutely. And it's interesting on let's say two other points right here. In 1912, Teddy Roosevelt ran as a progressive for national health insurance. And it's been shut down politically over all these years since then, but it's not a fringe idea. The other thing, we get all kinds of reasons by the coalition and corporate coalitions against Medicare for All, one of which is it'll be too disruptive. Well, I can tell you, I was in practice in a small town in Mount Shasta, California in 1965 when Medicare came in; it wasn't disruptive at all.

Ralph Nader: One point you make in your book on page 177, is if you have full Medicare for All, you're going to have more primary care doctors and there won't be this incentive to go immediately into specialized medical practice and you point out that having more primary care for patients is a great preventive approach--not just treatment approach and diagnostic approach. You say access is more available and efficient, getting primary care. Receiving more preventive services, costs are better contained with strong primary care; quality and outcomes of care improved by primary care. Primary Care provides better coordination, integration of care, and you spell it all out. You got to get this book listeners; how do they get the book? Because I want to ask you one last question-- what's the difference between Obamacare and Trumpcare? Which is the title of your book *Struggling and Dying Under Trumpcare: How We Can Fix This Fiasco* by Dr. John Geyman of Washington State. How can they get this book fast and have discussions in their living rooms and town meetings back home and really start a rumble? So, when the members come back for the Fourth of July recess from Congress, and they take off a month in August, they get some real citizen heat and citizen light and they get back with their orders.

John Geyman: They can get it on Amazon right away. They can get it through bookstores; it's out there.

Ralph Nader: Okay and also online probably, you don't want to give all the business to Amazon, right John?

John Geyman: No, it's online. Sure.

Ralph Nader: Right. How do they get if they want to get it from you? What if they want you to autograph a copy? Would you do that for them?

John Geyman: Well, of course, I would.

Ralph Nader: Because you are a great figure in American medicine and you get almost no press.

John Geyman: I have a website, johngeymanmd.org. So, they can find out more on all that.

Ralph Nader: That's G-E-Y-M-A-N, Geyman.

John Geyman: Dot.org, yeah. johngeymanmd.org, yeah.

Ralph Nader: Have you been on NPR or PBS in recent years?

John Geyman: No, no.

Ralph Nader: There you are. I'll bet you they've had 100 cosmetic surgeons dealing with vanities of men and women on hundreds of times.

John Geyman: Yeah.

Ralph Nader: How do you contour the nose that's pointed, upward doctor? What an insane system of media priorities, isn't it? I just finished an article that says "the worst is first and the best is last" that I gave all kinds of examples, even in sports. The highest paid players are very often nowhere near the best players but even in politics, and book writing, in movies, in the professions, often the worst practitioners are the highest paid. And the loving, serving practitioners, like serving needy, poor patients are going over to Africa and dealing with the Ebola crisis, hardly get paid a living wage in the United States. So, what are you going to do about that? We have to have millions of people listening to what you have to say in reading your book. Maybe we can get some advice from Steve Skrovan and David Feldman; what about it?

David Feldman: Yes. Yes, I think Ralph; I think you let doctors off the hook. I can't get a straight answer from doctors. There are only 152 some odd medical schools in this country. And doctors have no right to play the victim in all this, why? You could solve this problem overnight. Doctors have to stand up and say this is unacceptable. We have a disease in this country. It's called our healthcare system. We're not going to practice medicine unless it's fixed. We're not going to work for these health insurance companies. We're going to go on strike. Why aren't we targeting the 150 some odd medical schools in this country who receive federal funding? There are fewer medical schools than there are congressmen to target; I'm sorry, this is infuriating.

Ralph Nader: You think there should be more medical schools?

David Feldman: I think there should be more medical schools, but if you want to get universal health insurance in this country, it's the doctors' fault. It's their greed. They could stop it in a second.

Ralph Nader: Is it the doctors or the American Medical Association, or both? What's the answer, Dr. Geyman?

John Geyman: Well, the AMA has been against national health insurance forever. Actually, it's

interesting, a little side story, in 1917 they had a social committee in the AMA, which came up with “we need something like national health insurance”, and they sent that out to the state chapters, which all came back, “no, no way ever”, so that's one little side thing, but yeah.

David Feldman: It’s like talking to an alcoholic and addressing all the issues other than the drinking. If you can't get the doctors on board, it's not going to happen.

Ralph Nader: Well, majority of doctors already David, in poll after poll, are for single-payer about 55%--higher percentage for nurses.

David Feldman: Yeah, I mean, so it's their fault.

Ralph Nader: What do you say?

John Geyman: It's our organizations that is the problem because they get bought off. But yeah, exactly right, Ralph, most physicians are and other health professionals, especially leaderships by nurses, is strongly for Medicare for All.

Ralph Nader: You have real touching examples in your book about how people, because they couldn't afford a certain procedure, ended up worsening in their condition and dying. This is America—land of the free and home of the brave. Before we conclude, what's the difference between Trumpcare and Obamacare? Dr. John Geyman, author of the brand new book, *Struggling and Dying Under Trumpcare: How We Can Fix This Fiasco*.

John Geyman: Well, Trumpcare is much worse than Obamacare. The GOP and the Trump administration has sabotaged Obamacare, but Obamacare wasn't fixing all of our problems anyhow. And Republicans still haven't come up with a healthcare plan and they won't.

Ralph Nader: Actually, Trumpcare took millions of people off Medicaid. Can you explain that?

John Geyman: That's exactly what they've done and they want a handover, through state block grants, the responsibility for Medicaid state by state. Well, a lot of the states cut it back to almost nothing. In Alabama, I think if you have a family income much over \$3,000 a year, you're not eligible, stuff like that so.

Ralph Nader: It’s as if Trump is telling the poor, you know, let the poor die they don't vote for him anyway?

John Geyman: That's what it is.

Ralph Nader: Well, Dr. John Geyman, the chief sponsor of your favorite bill in the House, H.R.1384, is Congresswoman Pramila Jayapal, and she comes right from the district near where you live.

John Geyman: Right.

Ralph Nader: Are you going to ask her to invite you to testify in the next hearing?

John Geyman: Yes, I will and I have been in touch with her and sending her the book and the pamphlet and of course, all that and thanking her for leadership; that doesn't mean I've been invited.

Ralph Nader: Well, if you do testify all kinds of reporters crowding around, interviewing you and you'll reach the national media.

John Geyman: Yes.

Ralph Nader: Thank you very much for all your good work Dr. John Geyman, the author of the brand new book, which you can have, called *Struggling and Dying Under Trumpcare: How We Can Fix This Fiasco*. And he doesn't let Obamacare off the hook one bit either. Thank you, John.

John Geyman: Thank you for having me.

Steve Skrovan: We've been speaking with Dr. John Geyman. We will link to *Struggling and Dying Under Trumpcare: How We Can Fix This Fiasco* at ralphnaderradiohour.com. Now we're going to take a short break and check in with our *Corporate Crime Reporter* Russell Mokhiber and when we come back, we welcome first-time guest Ben Burgis, who is going to tell us how to argue with right wingers; back after this.

Russell Mokhiber: From the National Press Building in Washington, D.C., this is your *Corporate Crime Reporter* "Morning Minute" for Friday, May 24, 2019. I'm Russell Mokhiber; Health Canada, the governmental agency responsible for public health, is charting a new course when it comes to dietary advice, particularly in the area of sugar substitutes. In a significant departure from the past as well as from the U.S. approach, Canada's new food and dietary guidelines released this year say zero calorie and low-calorie sugar substitutes are neither necessary nor helpful. That's according to a report in *The Washington Post*. Sugar substitutes do not need to be consumed to reduce the intake of free sugars, the guidelines say. The new Canadian approach seems to be that if a food or beverage doesn't have a demonstrated health benefit, it doesn't belong in your diet. New York University's Marion Nestle agrees. "Personally, I follow a food rule not to eat anything artificial. So, these sweeteners are off my dietary radar." For the *Corporate Crime Reporter*, I'm Russell Mokhiber.

Steve Skrovan: Thank you, Russell. You know, a lot of people on the right fancy themselves as eminently logical. In fact, one of the most widely read libertarian magazines is called *Reason*. Well, our next guest is going to tell us how those of us on the left can fight logic with logic. David?

David Feldman: Ben Burgis teaches philosophy at Rutgers, is the author of a new book entitled *Give Them an Argument: Logic For The Left*. It's published by Zero Books, which produces a

YouTube channel that also features Professor Burgis. You can also see him every Tuesday evening on *The Michael Brooks Show*. Welcome to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*, professor Ben Burgis.

Ben Burgis: Thank you. It's great to be here.

Ralph Nader: Welcome indeed. Now you're known in Rutgers circles, and around the country as a hard-boiled logician, driven by cold reason and facts, and not deterred by emotion. So how come you dedicated your book to, in your words, "my beautiful wife, Jennifer, among her many virtues, she's the best logic instructor I know."

Ben Burgis: Because it's true. I would also point out that one of the things I do try to argue in the book is that *Star Trek* got it wrong; there really is no conflicts between logic and emotion. You know, it's entirely possible to care deeply, for example, about pursuing political and economic justice, and also think carefully about how to achieve those goals.

Ralph Nader: How do you like that, David?

Ben Burgis: I didn't hear your laugh, David.

David Feldman: No, I'm listening.

Ralph Nader: All right. Let me ask you some side questions before we get into a couple of areas dealing with how you deal with Ben Shapiro and Nate Silver.

Ben Burgis: Yeah.

Ralph Nader: MSNBC fancies itself as a liberal network in contrast to the Fox cable outlet, and yet they never invite, with very few exceptions, progressives like Jim Hightower, Bill Greider, me, even Mark Green. Rachel Maddow doesn't want to be anywhere near a progressive. You think there's a legitimate distinction to be made between liberals and progressives, given that you described yourself as a thinking person's Marxist?

Ben Burgis: Yeah, I would make a distinction between liberals and leftists that I think that that kind of MSNBC liberal like Rachel Maddow, really what you get/the message you get from them is this kind of technocratic centrism, that political problems come from people just not having, you know, being too ideological, not thinking hard enough about the sort of technocratic wonky solutions to them. That's why Obama spent his whole first term trying to pursue a grand bargain with Republicans, because he thought if everybody could just get over all this ideology then they could just, you know, reason together, then they could figure out how to slash entitlements and allegedly save Social Security and all that stuff. That's very different than the kind of left-wing values that I care about.

Ralph Nader: Okay, so let's segue right into one of your most powerful points. You quote Nate Silver, who for years was the analytic pollster and analyst for the *New York Times* on national politics. And I guess he was pretty much in favor of Hillary Clinton, because he said on more than one occasion, and you quote this in your book, *Give Them an Argument: Logic for the Left*, Nate Silver says, "Clinton and Sanders voted together the same way 93% of the time" and you

know to someone who doesn't know much about the facts of the two politicians' record, that's a pretty impressive argument that Hillary Clinton's pretty left. And then on page 78, you say 93% is misleading. Here's some of the votes on which Hillary Clinton differed from Bernie Sanders.

1) The war in Iraq: Sanders voted against the invasion; Clinton voted for it. 2) A long series of votes to continue funding for the war, which Sanders opposed and Clinton favored. 3) A long series of trade deals, which Sanders opposed and Clinton favored. 4) The Patriot Act: Sanders voted against it; Clinton voted for it. 5) Reauthorizing the Patriot Act: Sanders voted against it; Clinton voted for it. 6) Guantanamo Bay: Clinton voted for a bill to force President Obama to keep the facility open by blocking funds to transfer detainees; Sanders voted against it. 7) The bank bailout: Clinton supported the bank bailout; Sanders opposed it. Now, why doesn't Nate Silver pay a penalty and reduced credibility for pulling off something like this?

Ben Burgis: Well, he certainly should. If pundits ever had to pay a penalty in reduced credibility, he might. It's also worth noting that a lot of those votes, obviously the list you just rattled off, shows that not every vote is equally important, right? Even if those had been the only ones that voted differently on that would still establish some pretty profound ideological differences, but a lot of those votes don't even make it into his factoid, because they happened when Bernie was in the House while Hillary was in the Senate. So, his factoid only takes into account the two years they overlapped in the Senate. And my favorite part of this is almost like a textbook example of how to mislead people with statistics. During the two years that they overlapped in the Senate, Hillary Clinton was running for president, so presumably, she wasn't showing up to the Senate every single day to cast votes.

Ralph Nader: Well, as a logician, you are peculiarly sensitive to the misuse of language, are you not?

Ben Burgis: Well, I think that's an important part of making good arguments, which is one appreciate.

Ralph Nader: Okay. So why do you call long-time prisoners in Guantanamo detainees?

Ben Burgis: I am just using the standard words, but I do see your point about that.

Ralph Nader: And why do you call social welfare services for the poor entitlements?

Ben Burgis: Well, again, those are, those are the standard terms, I would point out that whereas entitlement has been, the phrase, the word entitlement has been toxified by right-wing propaganda. On this point, there's nothing intrinsically wrong with the idea that people are in fact, entitled to these things. They paid into them; they are entitled to benefit from them even if they hadn't paid into them; they would just be entitled as human beings to have a decent retirement and all that sort of thing.

Ralph Nader: Yeah, because Social Security and Medicare, people pay into them. And they're called entitlements, yet hundreds of billions of dollars of corporate welfare, bailouts, handouts, giveaways, subsidies; the corporation didn't pay anything for them, and they get it all free and that's called incentives. Why a Marxist like you uses capitalist words to shoot yourself in the foot is beyond my comprehension. What's your response?

Ben Burgis: Well, I think that you need to pick your battles about whether to spend your time arguing about words and every single paragraph, or whether to communicate to people the language they already understand while trying to make what you see as the larger argument.

Ralph Nader: So, you don't believe in Confucius, the ancient Chinese philosopher, who says if you don't have the right language, you can't get to second base? That's before baseball.

Ben Burgis: Yeah, I was gonna say, I'll be very surprised if Confucius used a baseball bat.

Ralph Nader: Well, let's get to something else that fascinated me in this book, which some people may find a bit hard to read, but they can pick and choose. And it deals with 34-year-old Harvard Law grad, fast-talking, right winger Ben Shapiro, who thinks he can argue everybody into oblivion on a stage in front of an audience. Before you start dissecting his techniques briefly, because we don't have that much time, would you debate Ben Shapiro? And would you predict the outcome?

Ben Burgis: I would absolutely debate Ben Shapiro; Ben if you're listening, I'm down for that. And I would predict that the outcome would be that he would do what he always does, which is talk loud and talk fast and try to bulldoze through the substance of what's being said, but I hope that somebody there would call him on it in real time--showing and explaining exactly where his arguments go wrong--might make at least some of his more thoughtful followers think twice.

Ralph Nader: Is he afraid to debate people generally? He just likes to stand on the stage and engage in soliloquy?

Ben Burgis: Yeah, he likes to debate 19-year-olds who don't really know what they're doing, who ask him questions in Q&A on college campuses so they can use some progressive language in a faltering way, and he could yell at them and again, kind of bulldoze through what they're saying. And then somebody could make a little clip of it to put out on YouTube: "Ben Shapiro destroys another snowflake liberal on campus."

Ralph Nader: Tell us about his techniques briefly, what he gets away with, and how the *New York Times* praised him in a glittering profile, quite apart from his vicious attacks on Palestinian and Arabs, which is quoted in your book. It's a clear example of anti-Semitism against Arabs. How does he get away with this in the *New York Times* and what's his technique? He's making huge speech fees.

Ben Burgis: Yeah. So again, I think that a lot of Ben Shapiro's shtick is just that he is very loud, he sounds very confident, he talks very quickly, so you don't have time to stop and think about what he's saying and in fact, if you look at his book--he wrote a little booklet about how to argue with leftists and destroy them--which is, of course, a very overblown title, but if you read the book, the vast majority of it isn't really about how to make good careful arguments, which is what you care about, if you want to get to the truth; it's about how to rhetorically frame the arguments. Despite this though, the *New York Times* had an article about him, which should embarrass everybody involved with it called "the Cool Kids' Philosopher", where they refer to him as the destroyer of weak arguments, which is really striking because if you read that article, they only give one example of him allegedly destroying a weak argument, which is he's doing one of his typical Q&A's on college campuses, a 22-year-old girl raises her hand and challenges

his position on transgender people's rights. And he says, "Oh, how old are you?" And she says, "Twenty-two." And he says, "Oh, can you just identify as sixty?" and she sputters for a second because it takes her a moment to sort of think of what to say. And then he just starts ranting at her, which, of course, if he actually cared about getting to the truth of the matter about carefully thinking about it, then he'd pause and let her collect her thoughts. So, he could say, "Oh, is this really a good analogy? Is being transgender really like being 22 and identifying as 60 or are those two different things?" But he doesn't want to pause to give people time to think about stuff like that. As to the Palestinian issue, where to be clear, he actually has a history of advocating literal ethnic cleansing. He has an article that he wrote, where he says that all Palestinians, not only in the occupied territories, but even in Israel proper, should be, he says, peacefully deported from the country, and he's since then disowned that, but in a very half-hearted way, you know, like he said, "Oh, that was dumb", but he still opposes the existence of a Palestinian state. And he still opposes, certainly giving Palestinians voting rights in Israel and if you oppose both of those things, then you're saying that this is a group of people who should be kept as a permanent underclass without basic legal or democratic rights.

Ralph Nader: And in fact, you quote, the title of his article is, "The Radical Evil of the Palestinian Arab Population" and he says the Palestinian Arab population is rotten to the core, the most evil population on the planet and he's still regaled in the *New York Times*. I mean, when is this guy going to get his comeuppance by people like you, who could nail him to the wall, invite him to Rutgers and dispatch him on the stage with your pure logic, reason, and ability to demolish his hateful, racist, bigoted articles and views? Because he's had a history of downplaying poverty and racial injustice; thinks the massive wealth gap between white and black Americans doesn't have anything to do with racial injustice. A person on the left would never get away with stuff like that. Can you have the student forum invite him to Rutgers? This will be a showdown in New Brunswick, New Jersey.

Ben Burgis: I think it's a fantastic idea. And yeah, clearly, this tells you something not only about what's wrong with Ben Shapiro, but what's wrong with American media culture in general, because what you can get away with saying about Palestinians and other Arabs, is clearly way out of sync with what you can get away with saying about other groups; that level of open racism, if directed towards almost anybody else, would certainly stop somebody from being positively profiled in the *New York Times* and it's absurd that it doesn't stop somebody from being positively profiled the *New York Times* when it's directed against Palestinians.

Ralph Nader: He's been on a lot of media. Have you been on PBS and NPR for this book?

Ben Burgis: No, I'd like to be, but I have not.

Ralph Nader: David, you suggested that we have Ben Burgis on--author of the new book, *Give Them an Argument: Logic For The Left*. You have any comments or questions?

David Feldman: Yeah. I was wondering if the fault is with the moderators of these shows because in the adversarial nature of a trial, we can get to the truth and yet we don't see that in debates where there are no moderators, enforcing penalties against logical fallacies. Why aren't they improving debates, Ralph? You had the taboo debates and I noticed that even you didn't have somebody throwing flags down on logical fallacies.

Ralph Nader: You're referring to the website debatingtaboos.org David, where we had four subjects that really aren't debatable. They're sort of taboo, like anti-ballistic missile defense, which is a phony unworkable, \$14 billion a year project by the Pentagon and we did debate whether anti-Semitism against Arabs is worse than anti-Semitism against Jews in the United States and we had a very civil debate with two people on each side and you can decide for yourself listeners. Go to debatingtaboos.org, but I think it's more than that David; it's that university and college campuses are often dead zones intellectually. There's no ferment; people come and talk and most of the seats in the auditorium are empty. People who have serious dramatic controversial issues that don't happen to be in the news, like the sexual harassment issues are today, don't even get invited anymore. I remember speaking at Rutgers and they were hanging from the rafters, at Princeton hanging from the rafters, at law school hanging from the rafters. And the conditions then were nowhere near as bad as conditions are today for tens of millions of people, and the expansion of empire, and the domination of global corporations over almost every enclave of life in America. So, it goes right back; the students are not demanding serious speakers. They like Seth Meyers, and other comedians, for whom they pay huge lecture fees. What do you say about that Ben, what's the situation? What's the climate in the universities these days--am I incorrect?

Ben Burgis: Well, I was gonna say if they want comedians and can pay huge fees, they should invite David Feldman, but in any case, I think there is some truth to that. I think that probably has a lot to do with the increasingly prevalent idea that the purpose of a college degree is just sort of credentialing for the job market, to get skills that will please employers, which really de-emphasizes the idea that it's a positive good in itself to spend a few years learning to read and think and devoting yourself to ideas, which is something that both makes college campuses less interested. And it's also important to talk about because I think one of the goals of the left that is talked about now more in the last couple of years is everybody being able to go to college, right? You know, that we want tuition-free public universities and I think that if we're going to do that, we really have to think about how we're going to sell that, you know, to make a good honest argument for it, because it can't be that Oh if everybody goes to college that everybody will get a good middle-class job, but it will solve the economic inequality because the more people who have that credential, the less it's worth in the job market; that's just how supply and demand work. So, if we're going to make an argument for it, we really have to make an argument for the positive good of going to college, the positive good of getting to have that enriching experience. And you know, learning to read and think in that way and do things like go to see controversial speakers and get excited about that.

Ralph Nader: Well, listen, we're out of time, Ben. We could go on and on. I hope you get other media; I'll certainly recommend it. We've been talking with Ben Burgis, who is a professor of philosophy at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey. He's the author of the new paperback, it's not that long to read, called *Give Them an Argument: Logic For The Left*. Thank you very much. Ben Burgis.

Ben Burgis: Thanks, Ralph. It's an honor. I voted for you twice.

Ralph Nader: Thank you.

Steve Skrovan: We've been speaking with Ben Burgis. His book is *Give Them an Argument:*

Logic For The Left. We will link to that at ralphnaderradiohour.com. I want to thank our guests again. Dr. John Geyman, Professor Ben Burgis; for those listening on the radio, that's our show; podcast listeners, you're in for a treat. Stay tuned for the bonus material, we call the Wrap Up, where we not only continue our conversation with Dr. Geyman and Professor Burgis, but we also talk to, as a bonus, ocean conservationist David Helvarg, who you'll hear talking about putting the blue in the Green New Deal. A transcript of this show will appear on the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour* website soon after the episode is posted.

David Feldman: For Ralph's weekly column, it's free to go to Nader.org; for more from Russell Mokhiber go to corporatecrimereporter.com.

Steve Skrovan: And Ralph's got two new books out, the fable, *How the Rats Re-Formed the Congress*; to acquire a copy of that go to ratsreformcongress.org and *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 will link to that also.

David Feldman: The producers of the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour* are Jimmy Lee Wirt and Matthew Marin; our executive producer is Alan Minsky.

Steve Skrovan: Our theme music, "Stand Up, Rise Up", was written and performed by Kemp Harris; our proofreader is Elisabeth Solomon.

David Feldman: Join us next week on the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour* when we welcome back Eric Steenstra of Vote Hemp and journalist Catherine Eban and her book *Bottle of Lies*, about the generic drug boom. Thank you, Ralph.

Ralph Nader: Thank you, David, Steve, Jimmy, and remember folks, if we want to get single-payer, it's Congress. That's what John Geyman has been fighting for and has offered his new, helpful book *Struggling and Dying Under Trumpcare: How We Can Fix This Fiasco...* We the people turning Congress around, unbeatable!