

## RALPH NADER RADIO HOUR EP 312 TRANSCRIPT

**Steve Skrovan:** Welcome to the Ralph Nader Radio Hour. My name is Steve Skrovan along with my co-host David Feldman. Hello David.

**David Feldman:** Hello, good morning.

**Steve Skrovan:** We also have the man of the hour, Ralph Nader. Hello Ralph.

**Ralph Nader:** Hello. We're gonna know a lot about the difference between corporate science and honest science.

**Steve Skrovan:** That's right. On the show today we're gonna talk about how corporations manipulate science to make dangerous products seem safe. We're gonna do that with Dr. David Michaels, author of *The Triumph of Doubt: Dark Money and the Science of Deception*. He cites bogus studies, congressional testimonies, think tank policy documents. All of these things are tools in the corporate toolbox to muddy the waters, to throw up dust, to create doubt about the straightforward conclusions of science. We have seen this in the climate debate with just the fact that I'm using the word debate shows how pervasive it is; there is no scientific debate about the climate science. But, that just shows how effective it has been. This is not a recent phenomenon. This is a tactic that has been used by corporate power and their enablers in the political arena for decades. The tobacco industry, the auto industry, even in the professional sports industry, they've all tried to cast doubt on the scientific facts, when those facts were inconvenient to their profit-making. So, we look forward to that discussion with Dr. Michaels who has a tremendous amount of experience in the occupational health and safety field. As always, after that we will take a short break to check in with our corporate crime reporter, Russell Mokhiber whose own many reports, regular listeners know, dealt with the same subject. In the second half of the show David and I are going to talk to Ralph about the latest developments in the coronavirus pandemic. We will talk more about what Trump is doing of course, and Ralph will tell us what he thinks about Bernie Sanders's status as frontrunner in the Democratic Primary. If we have some time left over, we'll try to knock out a few listener questions. First, there's been a lot of outrage directed in recent times to Donald Trump's anti-science policies, with movements such as the March for Science. Our next guest argues that this is nothing new and actually the result of decades of campaigns by the tobacco and fossil fuel industries for instance, to stop the regulation of deadly products. David.

**David Feldman:** Dr. David Michaels is an epidemiologist and professor at George Washington University's School of Public Health. He was Assistant Secretary of Labor for [the] Occupational Safety and Health Administration [OSHA] under President Barack Obama. Under President Bill Clinton he was Assistant Secretary of Energy for Environment, Safety and Health charged with protecting workers, residents, and the environment around US nuclear weapons facilities. Dr. Michaels has won many awards for his science advocacy, and has authored *The Triumph of Doubt: Dark Money and the Science of Deception*. Welcome to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*, Dr. David Michaels.

**Dr. David Michaels:** Well thank you so much, David. I'm happy to be on the show.

**Ralph Nader:** Welcome indeed. This is a very unique book because it not only reflects experience, it affects everybody listening to this program, people around the country, but it names

names. It names the names of corporate lawyers, scientists for sale, politicians who deceive along with the scientists. And, in that sense, very, very useful. Dr. Michaels's book has been out a few weeks now, Oxford University Press. He has yet to be interviewed by NPR or PBS. Maybe our listeners can help resolve that exclusion. Let me start with this, Dr. Michaels, in your book you say "The scientific enterprise is at a crossroads, I believe. We as a society are at a crossroads. We need to understand what's still going on, what the consequences have already been for public health." You say that the science--how science can be used to either protect our health and planetary well-being or misused to damage them. And, you talk about a lot of things that are kitchen table issues. You talk about how the misuse of science has supported excessive sugar, excessive utilization of alcohol, toxic chemicals, contamination of water pollution, and of course deferring a straight-on challenge to the perils of climate catastrophe. I thought your table of contents was revealing, too. It includes: The Forever Chemical, which we'll get to, The Deal with Diesel, On Opioids, Deadly Dust, Volkswagen's Other Bug, The Climate Denial Machine, and Sickeningly Sweet, relating to heavy sugar in food. Let me start with your more intriguing statements in your book, Dr. Michaels. You mention President Trump's "desire to reverse anything the Obama administration did; if Obama supported it, Trump would do the opposite, no matter what the consequences." Can you elaborate that?

**Dr. David Michaels:** Certainly. There are so many different areas in which the Trump administration has just looked at what the Obama administration did and tried to do the opposite even in the face of what some of the big corporations want. Everything that we learned in Political Science 101 tells us that when major corporations want something from the federal government, they shouldn't really get it. The Trump administration not only is rolling back auto mileage standards on behalf of the oil industry, which really will benefit from it, but they've done some things like tried to push through a regulation that would allow the most dirty diesel-belching engines, ones that put out particulates that will cause hundreds, or perhaps thousands of cases of cancer, with health regulations that would allow that, over the objections of the trucking industry and the biggest engine manufacturers. The only way to explain that is it's a reaction against what the Obama Administration did, because there are only a couple of companies that want this, and the big guys don't even want that! But mostly what they're doing is really on behalf of corporate polluters and manufactures of dangerous materials. One of the first things Scott Pruitt did when he took office to run the EPA was to roll back a decision that was made by the EPA earlier, to ban a really terrible pesticide called Chlorpyrifos. This is a chemical that slows down children's neurological development; it impedes it. No one should be exposed to it. In Europe it's been banned. The evidence is very clear but Dow Chemical didn't want it to be banned. The president of Dow or the CEO of Dow met with the administration and lo and behold they reversed that decision. Now, California has moved forward and will ban that chemical. Hawaii has already banned it. So, Dow, actually it has a new name, but finally will take it off the market. That's only because people organized around it. Environmental groups, farmworker organizations said, "We've got to get this chemical off the market."

**Ralph Nader:** That's amazing. He's not only buckling to corporate lobbyist's demands of the worst kind, to increase the peril, the hazard, the casualties, to men, women, children, families all over the country, regardless whether they're Trump voters or not. He even, in his obsession against Obama, is pulling back on standards that the companies have already complied with and said, "Why are you doing this?" Explain the rollback on mercury emissions, which are deadly.

**Dr. David Michaels:** Exactly the same thing. Mercury is present in coal and if you burn coal, as

many utilities that generate electricity do, the mercury gets up into the air. It then is deposited on the ground. It goes into plants. Fish eat the mercury; the fish become toxic. Again, that has an impact on children, on pregnant women. The utility industry, all those coal-burning electrical generating plants have said, “Don’t roll back this regulation; we have it under control; we think we can control the mercury”. Trump is just ignoring them, really because the Obama administration moved to control mercury emissions. It is frightening, it’s dangerous and the cost in terms of human development is huge.

**Ralph Nader:** And the gross parallel of this of course, is opening up the flood gates of oil and gas exploration/production, ignoring energy efficiency, ignoring renewable energy by Trump. And, in effect, releasing huge amounts of greenhouse gases, which will further produce massive storms, wildfires, tornadoes, floods and he’s making America dangerous again.

**Dr. David Michaels:** That’s exactly right. At the same time, he is really decapitating the Federal Science Advisory Committees that help the agencies figure out exactly what’s going on and advise them on how to better protect the public. They’re getting rid of a bunch of the advisory committees and then stacking the rest of them with folks who have a very similar view. They don’t even represent the big corporations. They represent the most extreme position of saying, “We should do nothing at all to better protect the public.”

**Ralph Nader:** The rampage that Trump is on now is extraordinary even by his standards of a couple years ago. He’s now telling the agencies, “Don’t you dare use the word climate change.” He has told the Centers for Disease Control that. When an epidemiologist, one of your career colleagues protested--who was in charge of a section of CDC connecting human health with climate change--they ostracized him, made him stay at home and effectively shut down the 20-person group, although they’re still employed. When he wants to come back to his desk, he has an armed escort. This is just part of it. The other part, what Trump is doing, he wants all the judges that are appointed to the federal courts to basically play to his drum beat and crush any kind of protective health, safety and economic policies and standards coming out of Washington, DC, and turn the government over to Wall Street. So, the situation is very dire and they use scientists for sale, which you have described in your book. Why don’t you describe Science for Sale in the context of one of your chapters which is “Sickeningly Sweet.”

**Dr. David Michaels:** That’s really about the sugar industry, and food manufacturers that rely deeply on sugar like particularly the soda industry: Coca-Cola, Pepsi, Dr. Pepper; those are the big ones. Through their trade association, the American Beverage Association, they have done everything they can to convince people and to convince the government that sugar is not bad for you even though sugar really is empty calories. You get calories; you get no nutrients from it. If you’re limiting your food intake, you certainly shouldn’t rely on sugar; you should be getting better intake. But really since 1940’s the sugar industry has focused on opposing science, opposing the evidence, opposing research that says things like “sugar increases your risk diabetes or obesity.” In fact, one of the stories I tell in the book is that when the tobacco industry first got off the ground in terms of their whole playbook/their denial playbook, when they launched their program to convince the public that the evidence that tobacco caused lung cancer is unclear and uncertain, the very day they launched that, the former director of the Sugar Research Foundation wrote them a letter saying, “You need my help. I was doing this for sugar in the 1940’s.” And they hired him of course to become the deputy director of their program to fool the public. The sugar industry have continued that for many years. Just most recently, over the last few years, you could see what

the beverage companies have done. First, they had a big campaign, that Coca-Cola ran that hid their involvement, to convince people that the problem isn't caloric or sugar intake; you just need more exercise. As long as you have, as they called, balance, if you exercise enough, you can drink as much soda as you want! Of course, Coca-Cola didn't tell you that they were behind that. What they don't say is you would have to exercise all the time, and it's really not possible to burn off all the sugar you're taking in through Coca-Cola, Pepsi, and those other products.

**Ralph Nader:** Fortunately, that was disclosed by the press. They did a good job exposing that.

**Dr. David Michaels:** Yeah, it's actually again, scientists who picked it out, found it, and then gave it to the *New York Times* that really then ran with it. And you know, Coca-Cola was embarrassed. The thing about a company like Coca-Cola is, you can embarrass them. A lot of chemical companies, they don't really care what you think about them. They're not public effacing; they don't worry about consumers. If Coca-Cola looks bad, you could go to one of their rivals, so it's actually an effective strategy to go after them. What they do through their American Beverage Association is they hire these, what I call mercenary scientists. These are product-defence consulting firms whose business model is based on providing whatever answer the company, their sponsor, wants. There have been lots of studies that show sugar increases risk of obesity or diabetes. What they have hired these scientists to do is to review all this literature and conclude, lo and behold, the evidence really isn't clear; there's too much uncertainty. All the studies are [of] low quality, therefore we shouldn't tell people to consume less of our product, sugar-sweetened beverages.

**Ralph Nader:** Let's talk about a substance that may be in the bodies of all our listeners, glyphosate. It is produced by Monsanto. On page 159 of your book you laid the predicate for what I want to ask you about and that is: there is a House of Representatives minority report that came out about glyphosate [in 2018].

[<https://docs.house.gov/meetings/SY/SY00/20180206/106828/HHRG-115-SY00-20180206-SD004.pdf>]

And you say, "It describes the secret efforts by Monsanto and the American Chemistry Council, the industry's trade association, to discredit the IARC, which is an international science group, including, get this, ghost writing scientific papers and articles in business publications, hiring journalists to discredit the agency, establishing front groups that appear to be independent and aggressively attempting to silence scientists who are involved in the IARC process, or who publicly agreed with the IARC conclusions about the cancer-causing impact of glyphosate." You want to elaborate that Dr. Michaels?

**Dr. David Michaels:** That's right, sure. Now glyphosate is a very important pesticide. It's used with genetically modified organisms. It will kill anything. If you spray it over a field of soybeans for example, if the soybean is grown from a seed that is modified to be resistant to glyphosate, glyphosate won't kill it. It will kill everything else. It is very widely used. It's the number one herbicide in the world, made by Monsanto. Monsanto has recently been purchased actually by Bayer, the big German pharmaceutical company. There's a branch of the World Health Organization called the International Agency for Research on Cancer [IARC]; they issue classifications or categorizations of different exposures, whether or not they cause cancer. They said, "We looked at the literature, and we think that glyphosates probably causes cancer. There's animal evidence, and there's some human evidence as well that glyphosate is associated with Non-Hodgkin's lymphoma." And so, they issued this finding: "it's probable; it's not definite but it's

probable.” Monsanto mounted a really nasty, underhanded campaign. You read some of the things they did. They hired scientists, in fact some of the same scientists who work for the sugar industry, to write reports that made it look like they were independent--though they were paid, in fact, by Monsanto--to say, “We looked at literature and we don’t see a connection at all.” They went after all the scientists who were on that World Health Organization panel, and they subpoenaed them. When the Republicans controlled the House of Representatives, they were able to get one of the committees in the House to start putting pressure and say, “we’re gonna defund you” because their money comes from the US Government. It was an incredibly ugly campaign. When that all came out, which has come out in some court cases, mostly in California, I have to say, jurors were furious. There have been a number of workers who developed Non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma who they said, “We think it’s caused by all this glyphosate exposure.” They were heavily exposed to glyphosate. When they sued, they won in court. But in a couple of cases the jurors looked at all these documents and they said, “Monsanto acted so poorly; it was so unethical what they did.” In some cases, they gave them hundreds of millions, or even a billion dollars punitive damage to send a message to the owners of Monsanto saying, “What you did in terms of lying about the evidence and the underhanded campaign was wrong.” Now, Bayer purchased Monsanto and *The Wall Street Journal* has called it one of the worst corporate deals ever made. Right now, Bayer is worth the same amount that they paid for Monsanto. That’s how badly they were hit. Once in a while companies get caught when they play these games with science, but for the most part they don’t.

**Ralph Nader:** Let’s talk about another chapter. You say “Volkswagen’s Other Bug”, what do you mean by that?

**Dr. David Michaels:** What’s very well-known is Volkswagen tried to become the number one auto company in the world by what they claim was a new technology diesel engine. And theirs is a new technology diesel engine, but it’s still not clean. Diesel sends out lots of different emissions. They put out nitrogen oxides, which lead to smog and actually causes lung damage and it also puts out these particulates, the soot you see, which causes lung cancer. But when Volkswagen said we want to sell a lot of diesel engines, they had to convince people it was safe--that these people were buying clean engines because no one wants to buy a car that’s going to be polluting the atmosphere. And so, they put in what we call a defeat device. This is a software program that runs the engine that when you took your car into the Department of Motor Vehicles to get emissions tested, the software would sense it was on one of these machines that held the car in the right place to test the engine, and it would put out no emissions; it would be phenomenally clean. When it went out to the road, it would put out many times more--40 to 80 times those emissions. They were really destroying; they were putting out a huge amount of pollutants when everybody thought they were safe. Eventually they were caught by the California Air Resources Board, and Volkswagen eventually fessed up to it. But in the meantime, and this is the story I tell on the book, their public relations people said, “We need to come up with a story that makes diesel look safe, our new diesel look safe, because this World Health Organization, the same group that we just talked about for glyphosate, had said correctly that “diesel engine exhaust is a carcinogen; it causes lung cancer.” It’s a great story I’ll only tell very briefly. They said, “We’ll do a study where we’ll put people on bicycles exercising, and we’ll pump in some of these emissions from our Volkswagen Beetles and we’ll show it’s not very dangerous.” I think they realized the optics of a German company putting people in chambers and pumping in gas wasn’t really going to fly. So, instead they used monkeys and they set up a study in New Mexico paid by a lab. And, when they didn’t get the result they wanted, they withheld the money from the lab until the scientists at the lab changed the results so it would say exactly what Volkswagen wanted them to say. They didn’t care about actually the

pollution or the science; they just wanted the public relations ability to say, “our engines are safe.”

**Ralph Nader:** Listeners should know that this deception not only put into the air nitrogen oxides. Fortunately, there were only about 580,000 such cars in the US; most of the cars were in Europe and other countries. Most of the ones in US were in California. It cost VW billions and billions of dollars in fines and payouts. And where is VW now? Right up there at the top, selling cars and making profits! You see, the corporate entity is so resistant to any kind of serious accountability; they transfer the cost; they deduct the cost on their tax returns and they’re back in business. Well, you have this intriguing chapter title called “The Forever Chemical.” Before we get to the one on the “Climate Denial Machine”, what’s “The Forever Chemical”? We’re talking with Dr. David Michaels, the author of a brand-new book, *The Triumph of Doubt: Dark Money and the Science of Deception*. He headed the Occupation Safety and Health Administration [OSHA] under Obama about which we’ll return. What is the forever chemical?

**Dr. David Michaels:** These forever chemicals, they’re called PFAS chemicals. The F is for fluorine. They will protect any material, cloth, paper, from oil or water, and so they’re the basis for Teflon, Gore-Tex, Scotchgards--all the materials that we’re very familiar with. They’re in all of our bodies. There is so much of this used on food wrapping, on pizza boxes, they’re everywhere and we have a lot of evidence they’re really quite dangerous. In fact, there is really no safe level of exposure. The levels which we think don’t cause harm, are down in the low parts per trillion. This is a chemical which we really should be getting out of our water; we should be getting out of our food. Right now, there’s still far too much exposure of it.

**Ralph Nader:** Under California law, doesn’t it have to be disclosed on the pizza package?

**Dr. David Michaels:** That’s a good question. I would think it should be, but these PFAS chemicals have huge effects. They’re well documented to cause cancer as well as a number of other outcomes related to the immune system. They’re on the package of the pizza so I actually don’t know exactly if that’s a requirement under Proposition 65.

**Ralph Nader:** That could really expose the situation you’re talking about and radiate right through the country and it might lead to some success because California has the toughest labelling law for any carcinogens. Let me ask you about this, you give a positive story about the issuance by OSHA, when you headed OSHA of the silica standard in 2016. Before I have you explain how important that is to workers in particular, I heard [that] in 2012, during the presidential campaign, you wanted to issue that standard and the Obama politicians wanted you to put it off. What was the situation there? What’s the true story there, Dr. Michaels?

**Dr. David Michaels:** That’s right. Silica causes a disease called silicosis and it also causes lung cancer. More than two million workers in the United States are exposed to silica. It’s common in construction sites. It’s sand, but much, much finer, not the sand we see on the beach but a hundred times smaller. If it gets in your lungs, it can cause real damage. OSHA’s standard was hopelessly out of date and when I got to OSHA in 2009, people had been working on the [silica] standard for a long time, but the Bush Administration never wanted it to see the light of day. We worked very hard on it, and we pushed from the beginning, but it was controversial because many employers, especially in the building trades, which is construction, people didn’t want to see it happen. When we were getting ready to send our first draft to the White House, we got word saying this is not going to move forward for the moment. The reason was, in the very beginning of the Obama

administration under the Democratic Congress, [it] had passed two major pieces of legislation. One was the Affordable Care Act and the other was the Dodd-Frank reform of the financial system. At that point we were approaching the second [term], the election in 2012. The White House felt anything controversial at that point could lead to Obama not getting a second term. If President Obama didn't win the second term, those two really landmark pieces of legislation would be rolled back and overturned. They pointed out something you were trying to do, with the silica regulation for example, would never survive because we'd have to go into the second term to finish it anyway. And so essentially it went on hold for a year, or a little more than a year until after the election. When President Obama was re-elected in 2012, we could then start moving forward again. Although I understood the reasoning for it, it was unfortunate. I think the concern was we'd won these two victories and we couldn't justify anything that could jeopardize those. We held the silica regulation and didn't move forward for really over a year.

**Ralph Nader:** Well, it's nothing new for me. Ever since I pushed to get OSHA through in 1970, there's always been White House pressure, in addition to corporate pressure, on OSHA. Let's back up a bit. I think this is gonna surprise our listeners. Give an estimate of how many workplace-related deaths--that's the causal phrase--are involved in America every year. How many workplace-related deaths in terms of trauma, like collapse of a construction site, and in terms of disease like silicosis, or Coal Miners' pneumoconiosis?

**Dr. David Michaels:** Well the trauma we have a good idea for and it's somewhere between four and five thousand, which ends up being 14 people a day are killed on the worksite with a traumatic injury. There are no good studies; we only have estimates of the number of workers who are dying from cancer related to exposure to benzene, silica, asbestos, or formaldehyde. In the last studies that were done by other federal agencies, and they are good studies, there's probably about 50,000 a year.

**Ralph Nader:** I heard the total figure, I heard about 15 years ago was 58,000 workplace-related deaths from disease and trauma. And that doesn't count injuries and sickness and disability [for] people who survive, but their livelihoods are ruined and their life quality is severely disabled, right?

**Dr. David Michaels:** That's correct. Right now, just based on the numbers of injuries employers report, a different branch of the Labor Department, the Bureau of Labor Statistics, estimates there is somewhere around three or four million serious injuries a year. Recently, they've done some studies, which looked at those numbers compared to people who go into workers compensation or who have other problems, and they know that they're missing somewhere between 30 and 60% of the injuries. So, it could easily be true that five million workers have a serious injury a year and that gets no public attention in a major way.

**Ralph Nader:** It's by far the most underreported, other than medical malpractice, source of death and injury, and sickness in America today. Now, here's why I think it's gonna startle our listeners: the annual budget to maintain the giant US embassy in Iraq, following the criminal war that destroyed that country by Bush and Cheney, who are fugitives from justice, was about 500 million dollars. What is the annual budget of OSHA, the federal agency that's supposed to deal with an estimated 1,000 workplace-related deaths a week, and millions of injuries and sicknesses every year? What's the budget?

**Dr. David Michaels:** Just about that number. I think we're at \$540 million/\$550 million. It's about the same as what it costs to run the embassy in Iraq. OSHA is disastrously underfunded. And it shows how little the US government, and this is true of both Democratic and Republican administrations, how much they care about the working people of the United States to me. This agency should be far larger.

**Ralph Nader:** One of your predecessors told me that when I asked him what the budget of OSHA Should be, he said, "What's the budget for EPA?" I told him about eight billion dollars. He said, "That's what the budget for OSHA should be." Now, what is the role of organized labor here? We're talking about international unions, like the Machinists Union and the AFL-CIO. What are they doing? My information is that the AFL-CIO, which represents over 13 million workers through the member unions, has only one full-time staff in Washington working on occupational disease and health.

**Dr. David Michaels:** They actually have two. It's certainly not enough. We wouldn't have an OSHA but for the organizing of the labor movement, and you and people like you. You worked ~~were~~ hand in hand, exactly 50 years ago, it was 1969/1970 that the OSHA law was passed. It was passed in December 1970. All the advances that OSHA has made really were because they had the support and the pressure at the same time of the labor movement. But as I think all your listeners know, the labor movement has gotten much weaker and certainly much smaller. It represents only six percent of the private sector workforce and many unions in getting smaller, no longer has full-time safety and health staff. They still care about safety and health, and we could not have done our silica standard without the support of the Bricklayers Union, for example, where workers are heavily exposed to silica, the laborers, the steel workers, the machinists and others. But they have less ability to support OSHA and to help OSHA fight for better conditions for workers.

**Ralph Nader:** How well I remember that fight, Dr. Michaels. The hero in the House wasn't even on the relevant committee. He was Congressman Burton from California--what a driver, what an energizer. It was such a pleasure working for him on paragraph by paragraph of the OSHA bill. And so, you have the 50th anniversary of this champion bill of worker health and safety in this country in December. Are there any plans by the labor movement to highlight this and bring it to the attention of the media and the American people?

**Dr. David Michaels:** We've certainly been talking about it. I think either the passage of the bill was December 29, 1970, so that anniversary is coming up, or OSHA opening its doors in April. It will be Workers Memorial Day on April 28, 2021 and there will likely be some activity. The Labor Movement will do some things. I'm hoping, that the federal government actually steps up to the plate as well and recognizes this. Actually, to me, this is the moment to look back at OSHA and say, it's done some very important things. When OSHA started, there were 37 deaths every day in the American workplace. There are now 14 every day. Fourteen is unacceptable, but we've made some real progress.

**Ralph Nader:** In terms of trauma, not disease.

**Dr. David Michaels:** In trauma, right, but the gaps in OSHA are enormous. OSHA has standards for a few hundred chemicals, and almost every one of those standards is based on studies from the

1960's or earlier. They're so out of date. We know that people are getting sick at levels which are considered safe by OSHA. OSHA has enough inspectors now to visit every workplace once every 165 years.

**Ralph Nader:** Listen to that listeners, once every 165 years.

**Dr. David Michaels:** It's unacceptable and the fines are very low. Fortunately, we were able to get Congress to raise the fines in 2015. When I got to OSHA, they fined for a serious violation, but the maximum fine was \$7,000. It's now \$12,000, so it's a little higher. Fines are powerful incentives for very small employers.

**Ralph Nader:** No matter how serious, \$12,000? That's what the Walmart CEO makes in one hour.

**Dr. David Michaels:** Yes, in fact some years ago we had a very terrible event at a Walmart in Valley Stream, Long Island. It was a Black Friday. They advertised great deals if you got there five in the morning. They didn't think about what they were doing. A worker there, a security guard, was crushed by the crowd and killed. When OSHA went to court and said, this was a serious violation, that Walmart should have had crowd control plans, and there was \$7,000 fine. Walmart spent, I'm sure, millions of dollars fighting that all the way up. It didn't get to the Supreme Court. It got almost to the Supreme Court. OSHA won at every level, but just to fight the \$7,000 fine. That's the challenge of OSHA that big companies can outgun and they can out lawyer OSHA. OSHA is really understaffed.

**Ralph Nader:** That legal action against Walmart, Dr. Michaels, sent out a signal, so now, so-called Black Friday, is not subject to the huge rushes when the doors open, because all lead stores now, and the owners of these chains know that they could incur serious liability. So, it did have a good benefit.

**Dr. David Michaels:** That's right. And that's one of the ways when I ran OSHA. I would really try to pick our cases that we pushed hard to set examples for the rest of industry because you know you can't visit every workplace. So, what you have to do is you've got to impact employers who you're not inspecting. We had a real problem with DuPont. We had one terrible incident in Texas where four workers were overcome with a gas. They were making a pesticide/insecticide and they were killed. OSHA's fine was \$90,000; it was embarrassing. And then we went in and did some more inspections and our next fine was \$230,000. This is pocket change to DuPont and so I issued a very powerful press release saying that the entire safety system with DuPont had failed. DuPont makes a lot of money selling their safety consulting. That was the message that Dupont needed to get. The CEO actually came to see me after that and committed to improvement. So, OSHA has to use different tools, but right now OSHA is not doing those things. They're doing far fewer press releases.

**Ralph Nader:** If you put together the horrific casualty toll of American workers over the decades in workplaces--mines, factories, foundries, agricultural plantations, et cetera and you measure that up against the feeble efforts by the state and local, and federal regulatory agencies, the conclusion is [that] America is saying to all these millions of workers: who cares? I think if the heads of these unions decided to spend one week down on the shop floor, down in the mines, down in the foundries, down where the crops are harvested, and then go back to their offices, they will put a

much greater priority of their union on behalf of their imperilled workers. What do you think?

**Dr. David Michaels:** I think anything we can do to make this a high priority we should be doing.

**Ralph Nader:** What do you think of this particular thing--one week they work where their workers work to see what it is.

**Dr. David Michaels:** I think a lot of them know it. I think the ones who don't know it are the Senators, the members of Congress, the people at the White House who think that it's no big deal to go into a place where there's molten [liquified] steel everywhere, or work on these jobs at poultry-processing lines where you're in the cold, it's wet, chickens are going by you at incredibly fast speeds and you're supposed to do 60 or more cuts a minute; these things destroy your arms. They're terrible jobs. The folks at the USDA for example, the United States Department of Agriculture, have no idea, and they don't seem to care about these workers at all.

**Ralph Nader:** That's a spectacular example. Imagine a documentary showing how many chickens are fleeing by the inspector per minute and that the Trump Administration wants to increase the speed so that even more chickens are pushed on the assembly line. You can hardly, as an inspector, see the scabs, and the deficiencies of these chickens. How many now are permitted per minute?

**Dr. David Michaels:** It was 140 and it's now, at many facilities the USDA has allowed to go to 170 per minute. It's unthinkable in terms of the work that workers have to do to process to cut those chickens as they pass by them.

**Ralph Nader:** Are you serious, 170 chickens a minute?

**Dr. David Michaels:** Now, it doesn't mean that you have to slice every one of those. You can have two or three people on the line together, but what we found was that we'd go into a chicken processing plant and 40 or 50% of the workers there would have carpal tunnel syndrome or other conditions of their arms or shoulders or hands from this work. We know the actual rate is far higher because once it gets bad enough you have to leave. There was one workplace where a different government agency went and they found 40% of these workers with this terrible condition, carpal tunnel. When they went back one year later, they still found 40%, but many of the workers were new; the other ones had left. These conditions are destroying people's arms and they're leading to really lifetime disability.

**Ralph Nader:** These are the truly forgotten Americans. We're running short of time, Dr. Michaels. Let's go global on your chapter briefly, although it's got to be more than brief, but we've had shows on this, "The Climate Denial Machine".

**Dr. David Michaels:** It is. The most extreme example, where there is a clear science of consensus [is that] no one in the science community of any importance or really background, still questions whether the accumulation of greenhouse gases isn't leading to these climate changes and severe climate events. We may not be able to say the specific event is caused by the build-up of greenhouse gasses, but overall this is what's going on. But as the introduction to this program said, if we're even discussing that there's a debate over this, they've won. The fossil fuel industry, the Koch brothers have funded these questionable think tanks, a handful of scientists, and they're

given equal time by reporters. They're out there saying, "Well, we're just not sure; the science isn't there." It's a tobacco model, but it's resulting in catastrophic climate change. It's a machine that you know, right now, finally, some of the Republican leaders, Senator Marco Rubio, for example, has finally come around and said, "Well you know, maybe this is true; maybe there really is climate change." I mean come on.

**Ralph Nader:** As the floods in Miami Beach in Miami increased, Senator Inhofe is still a hardliner. He thinks climate crisis is a hoax. He's from Oklahoma. But Senator Scott who is the Governor of Florida, and who saw all those Republican villas and mansions being confronted by rising sea levels on the coast of Florida, he's changed. He now thinks climate crisis is real. At least I think the momentum is in the favor of honest science, not corporate science. I think our listeners would like to know the distinction. Corporate science is often secret; it is proprietary. It's driven by profit and it doesn't get peer reviewed. Academic science gets peer reviewed. It's open and available for the public interest protection of the American people.

**Dr. David Michaels:** I think the only change I would make to that is, there are now journals run by these mercenary scientists who do their own peer review. They will say "this study is peer reviewed" even though I look at who the peers are, and have some big questions. I think one of the lessons of my book is you cannot trust the science that's paid for by an industry that needs those results to protect itself.

**Ralph Nader:** What do you think needs to be done?

**Dr. David Michaels:** We need to have a new structure of research. The producers of those materials need to pay for the research. The JUUL company needs to be paying for the research to figure out what are the long-term effects of smoking e-cigarettes, but they shouldn't control the research. We need a system where they put the money in, but the government, or some sort of different body decides which scientists will get the money, what the methods are, and what the results mean. How would you believe Exxon Mobil who would do research on the effects of exposure to benzene for example, a product they make? For years they've been saying it really doesn't cause the same illnesses that we know it causes. The Tobacco industry is the best example. You don't believe in research paid for by Altria. Altria of course is one of the owners of JUUL Laboratories. We need to make sure that the science we use to protect ourselves, to protect the environment, has integrity. As long as it's being controlled by people who need a certain result, we're not going to be able to trust it.

**Ralph Nader:** That's why we need the refunding of the Office of Science and Technology in Congress, which was defunded by Newt Gingrich in 1995. That provided very objective advice to the members of the Congress and to the public. We need a new organization of academic scientists that can expose conflicts of interest as documented in Sheldon Krimsky's new book on scientists and conflicts of interest [entitled *Conflicts of Interest In Science: How Corporate-Funded Academic Research Can Threaten Public Health*]. He teaches at Tufts University. So, there are a lot of things that can be done, but we're very grateful for your contribution to the severely serious situation. Dr. David Michaels, who has just come out with the book *The Triumph of Doubt: Dark Money and the Science of Deception*. I hope that PBS, NPR, the networks, [and] the cable channels start giving you more air time, and newspapers more print time. Because as serious as this subject is, it's hardly mentioned even among the progressives in

the presidential primaries that we see from week to week under a debate format. It's hardly mentioned, so thank you very much Dr. Michaels. How can people get ahold of you?

**Dr. David Michaels:** The easiest thing to get ahold of me and to read more about my book is to go to the website I put up for the book, it's [drdavidmichaels.com](http://drdavidmichaels.com).

**Ralph Nader:** [drdavidmichaels.com](http://drdavidmichaels.com)., very simple. Thank you again.

**Dr. David Michaels:** No, thank you. It was very great talking to you.

**Steve Skrovan:** We have been speaking with Dr. David Michaels, author of *The Triumph of Doubt: Dark Money and the Science of Deception*. We will link to that at [ralphnaderradiohour.com](http://ralphnaderradiohour.com). We're going to take a short break now. When we come back, Ralph has got a few things on his mind about current events, namely the coronavirus, Donald Trump and the Democratic Primary. But first, let's check in with Russell Mokhiber in Washington, DC.

**Russell Mokhiber:** From the National Press Building in Washington, D.C., this is your Corporate Crime Reporter Morning Minute for Friday, February 28, 2020. I'm Russell Mokhiber. As the off-shore oil industries federal regulator completed its overhaul of a major well-drilling safety rule in 2018, the agency's director picked up the phone to a staff engineer to order up some changes. Scott Angelle, Director of the Bureau Safety and Environmental Enforcement, told the engineer to delete language from memos showing that the changes would contradict guidance from the agency's own engineers. That's according to a report in *The Wall Street Journal*. The memos were subsequently revised, but with no indication that Mr. Angelle had personally ordered the changes. The records show, among the detail strip, a note that agency staff had wanted no change to the testing frequency of critical safety equipment and that the staff does not agree with industry that an industry-crafted protocol for managing the well pressure was sufficient in all situations. For the Corporate Crime Reporter, I'm Russell Mokhiber.

**Steve Skrovan:** Thank you Russell. Welcome back to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*. I'm Steve Skrovan along with David Feldman and Ralph. Ralph, you've got a few things on your mind. Let's start with the latest developments of the pandemic, the coronavirus.

**Ralph Nader:** This is going to be quite a compelling lesson to the American people and the American economy. It's not going to be the only virus coming out of China. What it has taught us is 1) we're not prepared for it. Trump wants to cut the already frugal budget of the Centers for Disease Control and the National Institutes of Health and 2) it illustrates the extended supply chain to our companies--our tech companies, our food companies and Walmart who are importing from China. Since China is under heavy quarantine, the streets are empty. A lot of the airports are empty. The stores are closing. The factories are not in full operation. You can have everything you need to build the car in Michigan except a brake pedal from China and you can't complete the car. So that will be used as a tremendously powerful argument against global corporate-managed free trade, just in terms of our national security as well as our national economic self-reliance. Finally, what the virus is going to teach us is that we have our priorities completely upside down. If China is closing down, 60-70% of pharmaceuticals are coming from China and India, and the active materials in these medicines--we don't produce antibiotics anymore in the US. How about that for a national security threat? If China is overcome and some might close down because of

the coronavirus, what's that going to do to the supply chain of drugs to the United States? I think we're going to go back to self-reliance. I think we'll get some good arguments as to why a country like ours should not outsource critical components, critical products and jeopardize the supply chain as the coronavirus is doing. And it's not going to be the last virus.

**David Feldman:** Have you heard any reports that this is more of a public relations disaster for China than it is a health problem? Because if you look per capita, so far, more Americans die from the flu per capita than the Chinese are dying from the coronavirus.

**Ralph Nader:** First of all, it's just starting, David. It's starting and spreading. Now we know that you can catch it from someone who hasn't any symptoms but has the virus in them. This is the early stages of the coronavirus. There's also an added fear that once it's in the human body it may mutate and become much more virulent. We shouldn't be complacent at all about this. I'm glad to see the *New York Times* highlighting the urgency of the situation.

**Steve Skrovan:** Let us change subjects now. Bernie Sanders is the clear front runner in the Democratic Primary and it strikes me that there was a similar pattern that happened in the Republican Primary four years ago where you've got a clown car, Republicans who had trouble distinguishing themselves versus an anti-establishment candidate. This seems to be, at least as far as that goes, a similar dynamic where you have an anti-establishment candidate in Bernie Sanders, and a similar one, Elizabeth Warren, too, and you've got a bunch of these so-called mythical centrists trying to knock each other off. It doesn't look like that's going to work.

**Ralph Nader:** Well I think if Bernie gets the nomination and he connects with the delegate count of Elizabeth Warren, the others will fall in line because their fear, absolute fear, never mind animosity of another Trump four years, will unify the Democratic Party. Bloomberg on the outside will pump a lot of money in Democratic races to take back Congress and to get out the vote against Trump. That's the predictable scenario. Of course, you never know what can happen in terms of unanticipated events. The second thing I would say is Bernie Sanders is a mainstream candidate, defined as putting forth redirections and reforms that are long overdue and that are established in many European, Western European countries, Canada, places like Japan, and supported by majority of the American people. That's the definition of a mainstream candidate. When the Republicans won with Reagan, they called it a Reagan revolution. They didn't mind using the word revolution. But what they meant was it was a Reagan revolution by, of, and for the plutocrats and the oligarchs. Bernie's political revolution is really a restoration. We had tuition-free higher education in CCNY and University of California system and other public universities after World War II. Maybe a few dollars a semester were paid by the students. We had a Wall Street transaction tax back as early as the Civil War when the tax was put to help fund the Civil War. And we had the transaction tax that expired in 1968. It's nothing new; that's a restoration. And we had all kinds of Republican and Democratic people including Teddy Roosevelt, Republican, supporting universal health care. That's a restoration. I mean what's the big deal? Raising the minimum wage to \$15, that restores it to its inflation-adjusted, productivity-adjusted status back from 1968. So, we ought to get our categories accurate here. The Presidential Democratic Primary candidates called moderates, are tools of the banking system. They oppose \$15 an hour [minimum wage]. They oppose Full Medicare for All, free choice of doctor and hospital. They don't have any understanding how efficient that is. It comes in at half price per capita in Canada to cover everybody with free choice of doctor. In the US, we don't have free choice of doctor and hospital in many areas. We don't cover 80 million people [who are] under covered or not covered. It's

twice as much, over \$10,000 per capita per year compared to Canada's \$5,000 per capita per year. Why are we always thinking these things are radical? They're just restorations to the standards of living of hundreds of millions of people in Western Europe and elsewhere.

**Steve Skrovan:** Well it seems to me in the debate this past week, Elizabeth Warren actually made the argument that I've heard you make, Ralph, I've heard Rob Weissman make, that the ideas that she and Bernie are talking about are actually very popular; they poll very popularly. I think they're starting to make that argument. The press, I see, is starting to come around a little bit to some of this, too. It's fascinating sea change and I just don't think that these moderate, and again moderate is just the wrong word, these conservative Democrats are going to be able to overcome this wave.

**Ralph Nader:** Steve, if there were more polls on these questions, your point would be even more supported. They're like the national corporate polling organizations almost never poll on corporate crime. If you poll the American people on cracking down on corporate crime, breaking up the big banks that are too big to fail, it would come in 80, 90, 95%. And then people like Bernie and Elizabeth would be able to point to these polls. In the same way for occupational health and safety, the pollsters control a lot of what the agenda is because it keeps progressives from being able to say the majority of the American people, left/right, want these changes and they want them now because they're overdue and because they earn them.

**David Feldman:** Are there any progressive pollsters?

**Ralph Nader:** Almost none. This is a failure of organized labor. They should have their own, authentic progressive pollsters so they put issues that are never polled before the American people. Then they can show how much a left/right agreement there is. How many conservatives and liberals, when they're polled on matters confronting where they work, live and raise their families, come together and agree, instead of this constant manipulation on a few issues talking about polarization, red state/blue state. You think the credit card companies stop at the boundary between Alabama in the north? You think pollutants say, we're just gonna pollute the blue states, that's why they're upset. We're not gonna pollute the red states. We've got to change the dialogue listeners. You've got to start conversing with people. All starts with waves of conversations all over the country, people you meet in supermarkets at the water cooler, at the town meetings, at the school auditoriums. It can happen very fast. There is no more authentic speech than word of mouth. Word of mouth is the fastest, most authentic speech because it is transferred from friends and relatives, and co-workers. And it can go into lightning pace--millions of people a day once this gets underway. By the way, that's what Madison Avenue tries to do. They try to get excited word of mouth about the latest toothpaste or hotdog.

**David Feldman:** That's incredible about the polling. I've never even thought about that. It's who's asking the questions and how do they ask them.

**Ralph Nader:** That's right.

**Steve Skrovan:** The main argument, as I see it, between the Progressive Democrats and the Conservative Democrats, seems to be strategically seems to be The Progressives are saying "we need turnout." The Conservatives are saying "no, you need to get moderates, Republicans, or never-Trump Republicans." How do you assess that Ralph?

**Ralph Nader:** Well, I think getting non-voters to turn out taps into 110 million non-voters coming up in November; that's a much bigger reservoir. Many of them are down and out; they're low income. They haven't voted because they don't see anything of value attached to their vote; they don't see any politicians speaking to their issues--their living wage, their health insurance, their affordable housing, their ease of public transit, which they desire to get back and forth from work. Once you tap into those 110 million people, you bring out ten million new voters who didn't vote in 2016 in seven states like Pennsylvania, Ohio, North Carolina, Wisconsin, Michigan, Arizona, Florida and it's bye, bye Donald Trump. Go back to your failed gambling casinos in Atlantic City.

**Steve Skrovan:** Okay, this has been a great discussion. Let's just take one listener question before we go. This is from Lynne Mayo, and she's talking about *Fake President*. She says, "I could not find the Nader vote website you suggested for finding your 19 policies. Each attempt returned "page failed to open." She tried several times.

**Ralph Nader:** Well, you're right Lynne. You must have tried when the website was down for a few days. It is now back up. Thanks to your communication, we checked it out, it's now back up. People can go to [votenader.org](http://votenader.org) on my 2008 campaign, which I've left open so you can see large number of very important redirections and reforms that were taken off the table in 2008 by both the Republican and Democratic candidates, not even discussed, which I tried to inject in the public dialogue in support. Thank you, Lynne.

**Steve Skrovan:** Yes, thank you for that question. Keep them coming on the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour* website. I want to thank our guest again, Dr. David Michaels. For those of you listening on the radio, that's our show. For you podcast listeners, stay tuned for some bonus material we call the Wrap Up. A transcript of this show will appear on the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour* website soon after the episode is posted.

**David Feldman:** Subscribe to us on our *Ralph Nader Radio Hour* Youtube channel. For Ralph's weekly column, it's free. Go to [nader.org](http://nader.org). For more from Russell Mokhiber, go to [corporatecrimereporter.com](http://corporatecrimereporter.com).

**Steve Skrovan:** Join us next week on the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*. Thank you, Ralph.

**Ralph Nader:** Thank you everybody. As Trump doubles down his impeachable offenses, our book *Fake President* is all the more relevant for people who want to play a role in the neighborhood and in the community for the forthcoming elections.