

RALPH NADER RADIO HOUR EP 382 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 there.

Steve Skrovan: And the man of the hour Ralph Nader. Hello Ralph.

Ralph Nader: Hello. Action time.

Steve Skrovan: Yes, we're going to do a lot of action, in this program but we're going to start the show by remembering the late Senator Mike Gravel, who was a guest on our program last summer I believe. And he passed away this week. Most of you probably know Senator Gravel for his reading the *Pentagon Papers* into the *Congressional Record* back in 1971. And he was also a guest on the show last year after being recruited by a group of young activists who wanted him to run for president. So Ralph, the passing, another good one goes down.

Ralph Nader: He's a loss. At age ninety one he passed away. And he basically espoused a national referendum, and went into it in such constitutional detail and constitutional history, advice by some leading constitutional law experts, I might add, at law schools to make the case that the ultimate sovereignty is with the people. That everybody knows [since] the Constitution starts "we the people" in the preamble.

But he took it to a deeper level and said when the representatives are not responding to the dire necessities of the people and the justice needs of a society, they can go to national referendum, and he had a procedural pathway to it. And I'm sure the Mike Gravel Institute, which was started by two teenagers, one of them on his way to Columbia University, last year, as you said, Steve. And they're going to carry on, I understand, and continue as they go through their college years and pick up more support from the young generation.

He was a good testament to the old principle that the only true aging is the erosion of one's ideals. He actually got better, as he grew older. He had some pro-corporate positions as Senator from Alaska many years ago. But he became a genuine progressive and a genuine populist. Not just on the national referendum, but on a whole number of other issues. There should be a biography of Mike Gravel.

Steve Skrovan: So we're going to move on here, Ralph. You talked about action and you have an update on the Congress Club. Last week, to remind everybody, Ralph introduced this idea of a Congress Club and we wanted to get 100 Members signed up, and I think we're well on our way to that. Right Ralph?

Ralph Nader: Yeah, people are responding. They're going to RalphNaderRadioHour.com, pushing the Congress button to get a look at the simple application. We want serious people to devote a little bit of volunteer time. Pursuing the demand on their [US] senators and representatives for their positions on corporate crime, policy, and enforcement, and for their position on corporate tax reform. And if we get those positions in letters back to you listeners, then you send us those letters, and we can get a number of citizen groups who haven't been able to do this here in Washington, D.C., because they're not the voters that members presumably are more concerned about back home. We can pick up on it, move to congressional hearings, move to more media coverage and get rid of this defeatism that we see seeping back from the grassroots. You know we got a lot of comments about the overwhelming power of the corporations, they can't be challenged, forget about it. That's not the way a democracy operates, so thank you. Go to RalphNaderRadioHour.com and keep the applications coming and we'll give you a fuller report in later shows.

Steve Skrovan: That's right the button, it says Congress Club, it's on the right-hand margin at the top of the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour* landing page. And that's not all we've got the rest of the show here to do today. And our first guest will be one of our frequent flyers Dr John Geyman.

Anyone with eyes, a heart, and a brain knows that health care in America is a dysfunctional mess. It's classist, racist, sexist, pretty much any “-ist” you can think of. What sets Dr. Geyman apart is that, not only can he go point-by-point and tell us exactly what’s wrong with the system. But he can also go point-by-point and tell us what we need to do to fix it. While Democrats in D.C. pay lip service to watered-down versions of a single-payer system, neither Congress nor President Biden have actually done anything about it. Is the medical-industrial complex as indestructible as it appears? We’ll ask Dr. Geyman and we'll discuss his latest book *America's Mighty Medical-Industrial Complex: Negative Impacts and Positive Solutions*.

And then we'll welcome back another good friend of the show, Whirlwind Wheelchair co-founder Ralf Hotchkiss. He spent over 30 years designing wheelchairs in partnership with actual wheelchair riders, ensuring that each user gets the chair that fits their life and environment. Whirlwind’s work blends sustainable local economic development around the world, with thoughtful designs that empower wheelchair users at every step of the process. We're excited to speak with Ralf Hotchkiss and to hear the latest news out of Whirlwind Wheelchair.

Then, if we have time, Ralph will answer some more of your listener questions. And as always we'll check in with our corporate crime reporter Russell Mokhiber. But first, a Yale study has found that from 68,000 to 100,000 people a year who die under our current healthcare non-system, would be saved under a Medicare for All system. Our first guest is going to tell us why. David?

David Feldman: Dr. John Geyman is a physician and author. His latest book is *America's Mighty Medical-Industrial Complex: Negative Impacts and Positive Solutions*. Welcome back to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*, Dr. John Geyman.

Dr. John Geyman: Thank you. Glad to be here.

Ralph Nader: Thank you John. This is one of your many books on the subject. Nobody in America has documented the corruption and other problems of the healthcare industry as you have, over the years. And you come from an experience in family practice, and you are also professor of medicine for a number of years at the University of Washington. Your new book is *America's Mighty Medical-Industrial Complex* and you always have positive solutions, but I want to go back to the original traditions in medicine, before what you call the corporatization and the profitization of medicine, taken over by the big drug companies, the big hospital chains, the big insurance giants. What were the traditions that you start out in your book describing?

Dr. John Geyman: Well, they go way back hundreds of years and the ethic in medical practice has always been one of service, and not out to make profits. And our major role models back in this country for decades have been physicians of that type. Sir William Osler, was the best known physician in the world in his time, and he was at Johns Hopkins for years. But we've had many other examples. Dr. Arnold Relman, editor of the *New England Journal [of Medicine]* for 17 years or so, is a classic example. He warned us in 1980 of the dangers of a medical-industrial complex. And that's exactly what has happened. Eisenhower warned us, as he left office in '59 or '60, about the military-industrial complex, but we have this in health care; huge it's a huge industry, it's a sixth or so of the gross national product here in this country, and it's full of profit-taking and corruption. The book goes into lots of that.

Ralph Nader: Well, before we get into that, you dedicate your book to Dr. Arnold Relman and Dr. Jack Geiger. And I think Dr. Jack Geiger is quoted in terms of the principles and norms that you referred to before the corporations took over. He said quote "Medical care should not be a market commodity, but instead a social good distributed in response to medical need, a responsibility of government, and a fundamental right embodied in the social contract." Instead, what we have now is a massive conflict of interest by these big corporations against the health needs both preventive and existing ailments of the people in this country. As you point out, conflict of interest one is that they will deny care--insurance companies--if it makes them more profit. Conflict of interest two is that they will over diagnose and over treat if it makes them more profit. And third, is that they deny the people of this country access to influencing their Congress, which could produce a single-payer system; 535 people surrounded by thousands literally thousands of corporate lobbyist lawyers.

Dr. John Geyman: Yes.

Ralph Nader: ...drug companies alone have over 450 full-time lobbyists working on Congress at any given time. So there's a built-in conflict of interest against the health needs of the American people. And they're not interested, these corporations, in prevention, because prevention reduces sales. We can prevent trauma and disease by supporting health and safety standards, by really moving against the terrible junk food and junk drink industry that has fueled so much obesity, youthful diabetes, incipient high blood pressure. Reduce sales. So this is the main problem here, and this is why Dr. Jack Geiger and others have said it should not be a market commodity, because it puts the marketeers in a conflict of interest against the most serious necessities of the people. Can you describe, Dr. Geyman, the existing situation here that single-payer, which we'll get to, is supposed to treat?

Dr. John Geyman: Well, we have a total failure of our financing system in this country because it's based on this for-profit, multi-payer, private insurance industry. The biggest part of that is employer-sponsored insurance-- I call that E.S.I.-- that covers supposedly covers up to 150 million people, but that's falling apart, too. Actually it's interesting; I'm just doing a paper now on the future of work, as other people are looking at also. But after COVID now we're finding all these people who were working, some remotely some not, some let go. And now, their employers are trying to get them back into their work, and more and more, many people are feeling they were underpaid at the beginning, and I think I'll make a career change and etc, etc. Women find it difficult, because they don't have care for their kids. So employers are starting to get more flexible, but they're too little, too late. So the benefits under employer-sponsored insurance are getting worse and more unstable and cost more and more. So employers are finding they can't afford that insurance as much as they used to be able to, nor can their employees. So that's a big deal that's not talked about enough yet, but we have a failing system. Private insurers exit the market whenever they're not profitable, often with little notice. Huge bureaucracy. It takes the average doc now 14 hours a week to just do pre-authorizations for tests or treatments.

Ralph Nader: So the health insurance companies are playing doctor here.

Dr. John Geyman: Yeah they are.

Ralph Nader: And more and more employee insurance has to be co-paid right? for the employers are pushing off more of the premium onto the workers.

Dr. John Geyman: Yeah.

Dr. John Geyman: And the private health insurance industry, almost no one knows this, but it's been subsidized for many decades by the federal government, averaging now 685 billion a year, and the CBO [Congressional Budget Office] projects that to double in another 10 years. So, it's just gotta go; it's very unstable. Dr. Atul Gawande, who is a surgeon and public health researcher, and wrote his own book, *Being Mortal: Medicine and What Matters in the End*. Here's an important quote that summarizes the problem of employer-sponsored insurance. He

says, “the central error of our system has been attaching our health care to where we work. A company-sponsored insurance plan for a family adds an average of \$15,000 to the annual cost of employing a worker, effectively levying a 50% tax on a \$15 an hour position. We're all but paying employers to outsource or automate people's jobs. The result is to make both work and health care less secure and more pragmatic and to deepen our inequalities. So that's kind of at the guts of the problem of private insurance.

Ralph Nader: Very much so. In fact it would have crumbled a long time ago if it wasn't for the government bolstering it with hundreds of billions of dollars of subsidies and allowing a lot of billing fraud. There's about 350 billion, with a B, billing fraud every year. Sixty billion is defrauding Medicare, according to Professor Malcolm Sparrow at Harvard University who is the expert on this.

Dr. John Geyman: Yes.

Ralph Nader: I want to suggest to our listeners, Dr. Geyman, why they should get this book. One reason is it helps you in persuading other people who you think may join you in your pressure on Congress for single-payer, because it's loaded with easy-to-convey information that affects people on the ground where they work and raise their families. The second is you can give it to the local library, so more people can read it. Give it as a gift to the local library. And the third is what Dr. Geyman offered months ago, and he's renewing the offer. That is, if you write to Dr. Geyman, and all the information will be on our website, cited shortly, he will send directly this book to one, two or three of your chosen representatives in Congress; that is your two senators and representative, in your name, with your contact numbers back home, so they can't you know shove it aside, because it's some Washington-based person. It's going to be in your name. So if it's Congresswoman Jayapal out of Seattle it'll be someone from Seattle. So we're very thankful for your generosity here. I know you send the book there to every member of Congress, your prior books, at least. But that doesn't get their attention like a book coming in from a constituent. Don't you think?

Dr. John Geyman: This is true and I'll be glad to do that again as you suggest Ralph. And also, I will add the 30-page little pamphlet I do, *Common Sense* pamphlet that's modeled after Thomas Paine's pamphlets way back in the late 1700s, which was the most published piece of work of anything in this country, ever. Anyhow, my *Common Sense*, the fifth one *Medicare for All: What Will It Mean for Me?* I've already sent that out a lot but I'll send that with legislators, as well.

Ralph Nader: Right and that's a very useful little pamphlet.

Dr. John Geyman: Yeah.

Ralph Nader: I've used it. You've put that out after each one of your books. And by the way listeners, you've got to do it in the most effective way, so look at our website. You have to send a little message to your senators or representative in your own words. Ask for an

acknowledgement of receipt of the book. And ask for their opinion on the single-payer legislation. And just tell them that you expect the courtesy of a considerate response. But anyway, the details will be on our website. The website is RalphNaderRadioHour.com. That's RalphNaderRadioHour.com. Last time Dr. Geyman offered to do this, many of you took him up on it. So it's something that extends the impact of his books and his articles.

Before we talk about Medicare Dis-Advantage, because we have listeners who are really perplexed on this, and the weakening of support for single-payer by people like Bernie Sanders and Congresswoman Jayapal, what are your three reform alternatives?

Dr. John Geyman: Well, we could build on the Affordable Care Act. We could bring forward some kind of a public option, which the Biden administration is also considering. Or we can go to a real system of universal coverage [such as] Medicare for All, single-payer Medicare for All. The first two are politically easier, but they just don't work. The Affordable Care Act, it's 11 years now we've had that; it hasn't contained cost at all. It has allowed profiteering and an inefficient private insurance industry to be in place and profiteer. Health care is more unaffordable all the time, more inequities, very volatile. So, that's no answer at all.

Ralph Nader: It has included 20 million more people in this high-priced health insurance, hasn't it?

Dr. John Geyman: This is true.

Ralph Nader: And it's left out 80 million underinsured and uninsured still; 80 million people in this country but 20 million did get insured.

Dr. John Geyman: This is right, mostly through expansion of Medicaid. But 12 states didn't do that at all. But it's incremental and it just doesn't work. This public option idea, well the ACA or the Affordable Care Act set up a number of nonprofit co-ops, to try and compete with the insurers private insurers and almost all of them failed. At max they covered 11 million people through the ACA exchanges. Now that's down to 1 million.

Ralph Nader: Because the prices were too high.

Dr. John Geyman: Yeah.

Ralph Nader: ... the cost of health care.

Dr. John Geyman: They couldn't compete and they failed. So the public option is not going to work. Medicare for All is the only thing that will work. It'll control prices and costs. It will bring universal coverage to a national health insurance program, which is not for profit, based on medical need not ability to pay, and with full choice of hospitals and docs and other health professionals anywhere in the country. It will save at least 450 billion a year. Some other-- that's a Yale study-- other estimates put that up at closer to 600 billion a year. How will that be saved?

They'll have negotiated fee schedules for docs and other health care professionals who will still be in private practice. They'll have global budgeting of hospitals and other facilities. And they'll do bulk purchasing of prescription drugs and medical devices, which will control prices there. So...

Ralph Nader: Huge savings in administrative costs too...

Dr. John Geyman: Yes, huge.

Ralph Nader: None of these 15 inches of billing and inscrutable code...

Dr. John Geyman: Right.

Ralph Nader: ... all the rest of it, trying to get bills collected. People listening to this program know full well of the advantages of full Medicare for All. Comes in cheaper, covers everybody from cradle to grave, and saves lives. Nobody dies in Canada because they can't afford health insurance. But in this country, a Yale study has it over 100,000 people that's 2000 a week or more, who die because they can't afford health insurance to diagnose and get treated in time, not to mention the injuries and illnesses that are not treated in time.

Let's talk about a concern of our listeners' Medicare Advantage, which I've called it Medicare Dis-Advantage. John Glascock has really written a long letter here.

Dr. John Geyman: Yes.

Ralph Nader: He's from Torrance, California. You've got a copy of that.

Dr. John Geyman: I do.

Ralph Nader: How would you advise him?

Dr. John Geyman: Well Medicare Advantage is not a good program. Private insurers make lots of money from it, but patients lose. To summarize how patients lose, the insurers cherry pick enrollees. They will often hold a recruitment meeting on a second or third floor of a building without an elevator, so people with any kind of mobility problem can't get up there. They disenroll patients when they become sicker and less profitable. They actually do chart reviews to find out other diagnoses for up-coding for more revenues, even though they're not receiving care for those. This ad that we see every day, Joe Namath that's a deception ad, lots of disinformation. You don't get any real long-term stable benefits. And you have reduced choice. You can find quickly when you need care that your doctor [or] hospital are out of network, and pretty soon you get a huge bill. So, then you try and go back to Medicare, and you find that with Medigap or such you have a new pre-existing condition, and often you can't get back there. So...

Ralph Nader: They've trapped people. And don't they get you into narrow networks too? You don't have your free choice of doctor and physician.

Dr. John Geyman: Oh, of course, of course, they restrict networks all the time and on almost no notice. So it's a bad deal.

Ralph Nader: Well, Mr. Glascock ends up by saying there's quite a detailed letter, John...

Dr. John Geyman: Yes.

Ralph Nader: Ends up by saying, "My questions are always what else don't I know about these plans? How on earth do I research this? Where are these details disclosed?" In other words, he wants to know where he goes so he can choose wisely in the blizzard of ads by United Healthcare, Aetna and others pushing Medicare Dis-Advantage. Is there any place where there's a good source of information?

Dr. John Geyman: No. That's part of the problem. It's just like a hospital bill. Just try and find out how that surprise huge bill came about and the same with this on Medicare Advantage or disadvantage. I mean insurers, we make a huge amount of money from both Medicaid, privatized Medicaid, and privatized Medicare. So that's just the way it is.

Ralph Nader: Well, one way to respond is just say stay with traditional Medicare.

Dr. John Geyman: Right, of course.

Ralph Nader: You know that's got its problems because of corporate perforations and rip offs, but stay with traditional Medicare and you won't be in these trap doors and narrow networks and all kinds of trouble when you have a serious health care bill that these insurance companies don't want to pay. I mean this is basically, Medicare Dis-Advantage is essentially private health insurance plans, corporate health insurance plans, subsidized by the government, including traditional Medicare beneficiaries.

By the way, going back to your point on 12 states not expanding Medicaid, even though the federal government pays a large share of that under Obamacare, most of those 12 states are in the south, except for Wisconsin.

Dr. John Geyman: Yeah.

Ralph Nader: So whenever these southern governors, playing Darth Vader, try to lure people from the north to come and live in places like Alabama, Mississippi, Georgia, Florida, they don't tell you about the downsides. And not expanding Medicaid is just one of many downsides.

Dr. John Geyman: I want to go back to, Ralph just mentioned how we compare with other countries. The Commonwealth Fund in New York City has done for, oh 30 years or more,

studies of 11 countries around the world, advanced countries-- US, Canada, Scandinavia, Western Europe, Australia, etc. We are always dead last when it comes to affordable cost, when it comes to access, when it comes to quality of care [and] outcomes of care. So that's been true for years. Here's a quote I'd like I think our listeners will find useful. Dr. [Peter] Arno and [Dr. Phillip] Caper, are health policy experts and physicians; here's what they say. "The real struggle for a universal single-payer system in this country is not technical or economic but almost entirely political. Retaining anything resembling the status quo is the least disruptive and therefore politically easier route. Unfortunately it's also the least effective route to attack the underlying pathology of the American healthcare system: corporatism run amok. That's the big problem, corporatism run amok. Adopting the easiest route will do little more than kick the can down the road and will require repeatedly revisiting the deficiencies in our healthcare system until we get it right." Well that's what's going on now and we're seeing a debate right before our eyes about the easiest way to kick the can down the road. I'm hoping that the Biden administration will be tough enough to get rid of the 60-vote thing and to get past McConnell's blockage of everything in the Senate. So it comes down to political.

Ralph Nader: And it comes down to people in the listening audience starting a letterhead "people for single payer". And you have people on the side of the letter, who are advising you or participating you start with a small number of people, and then you add to it, you add to it. I'm telling you one thing, listeners, members of Congress get so little feedback on such issues in any organized way--they hear from the corporations, of course, organized. They get so little feedback from back home, a mere letterhead with 10 or 15 signatures spread throughout a congressional district or a state will start to get their attention. You send it to them by postal; you send it by email; you phone it in, and you tell them you want an answer and you want it in detail. No run around. And if they want more names, you'll add more names in the coming days and weeks.

Congress has now taken off essentially the summer! Go to nader.org to see my recent column. They have established a recess, where the House of Representatives works about two weeks between July one and Labor Day. Right in the middle of a crisis, they're taking off with full pay [and] full benefits, including health insurance, compliments of you the taxpayer. How long are you going to stand for this? I mean it's just amazing the lack of organized indignation putting forth on Congress irresistible rhetoric, supported by irrevocable evidence. And you've got it right here in the book and other books by Dr. John Geyman. This one, the most recent, is called, *America's Mighty Medical-Industrial Complex*. And then he deconstructs it and shows how it can be replaced with public universal health insurance and retaining private delivery, but under reasonable restraints, as in Canada. And he's willing to send a copy of the book in your name, once you go to RalphNaderRadioHour.com and get the details on how best to convey your thoughts to your [two] senators and representative.

So let's go listeners. You're supposed to be serious, compared to other podcast listeners in all the frivolities of so many podcasts. Let's get it going. Everything starts with a small number. I

remember when we went after the auto industry; in the 60s, they were considered invincible. Are you kidding going after GM? And a young woman in Illinois started a letterhead called “People for Auto Safety”. And she started getting names. And I'll tell you, the two senators and representatives knew her name all right and returned her calls. And others did in other states. And what was invincible developed a momentum where the auto and highway safety laws were passed in 1966 unanimously! There may have been one dissent in the entire Congress--unanimously. So much for the invincibility of the giant auto companies. Once people saw that they could be safe and their families could be safe in crashes with seatbelts and many other simple long overdue safety systems, and they wanted their defective cars recalled and fixed at the expense of the auto companies, they flooded Congress. And Congress moved faster than you can imagine. So, let's go people.

We've been talking with Dr. John Geyman, author of many books, one more recent one was on corruption and fraud in the healthcare industry. And you can get all these books. Give our listeners your website, John.

Dr. John Geyman: johngeymanmd.org.

Ralph Nader: That's John Geyman, G-E-Y-M-A-N-M-D dot O-R-G. A fellow Princetonian, I might add.

Dr. John Geyman: Yes, right,

Ralph Nader: Thank you very much. Thank you very much. Let's get a good response, listeners. A free book to each of your two senators and representatives, with your chosen words demanding a response on single-payer and what they think of this book. Don't let them get away with it. They've got plenty of time in the next few weeks [while] they're on vacation. Thank you very much, John. To be continued.

Dr. John Geyman: Glad to be here and thank you Ralph for everything you've done for many, many years in the public interest, the common good.

Ralph Nader: Well, to turn a phrase we've got to get it done. Right, John? Thank you.

Dr. John Geyman: Right exactly.

Steve Skrovan: We've been speaking with Dr. John Geyman. We will link to his book *America's Mighty Medical-Industrial Complex* at ralphnaderradiohour.com. Plus we'll link to his contact info so you can request a free copy for your senators and representatives. Let's take a quick break. When we come back, we're going to talk to our good friend Ralf Hotchkiss of Whirlwind Wheelchair. But first, let's check in with our corporate crime reporter, Russell Mokhiber.

Russell Mokhiber: From the National Press Building in Washington, D.C., this is your *Corporate Crime Reporter* “Morning Minute” for Friday, July 2, 2021. I'm Russell Mokhiber.

The Biden Justice Department is refusing to make public its database of deferred non-prosecution agreements. In August 2020, Congressman Jamie Raskin called on Trump Attorney General William Barr to release the list of all corporate deferred non-prosecution agreements. Barr did not respond. Now, the Biden Justice Department, under Attorney General Merrick Garland, is also not responding to calls to make public the database. The Justice Department's Public Affairs office did not respond to inquiries about the matter from *Corporate Crime Reporter*. "It is critical that the department, regardless of presidential administration, be fully transparent in its dealings with powerful corporate defendants," Congressman Raskin told *Corporate Crime Reporter* last year. 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. For 30 years in over 60 countries Whirlwind Wheelchair has been producing durable, low-cost, and highly-functional wheelchairs. Let's talk to the man behind that. David?

David Feldman: Ralf Hotchkiss is the Chief Engineer and co-founder of Whirlwind Wheelchair. Welcome back to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*, Ralf Hotchkiss.

Ralf Hotchkiss: Thank you.

Ralph Nader: Welcome indeed, Ralf. And you know for people who don't know about what it was like before the 70s, when the disability rights movement got underway, you got underway as an advocate for people needing wheelchairs. You have an engineering background, you never patented any of your improvements. What was it like confronting the crummy wheelchairs that the Jennings Corporation out of London produced and dominated the global market? Give us a sense of what it was like.

Ralf Hotchkiss: Actually, they were out of Los Angeles. And it was probably like riding a bicycle was like in the 1880s. The wheelchair still hasn't come up to the state of the art of the bicycle of in the 1890s. And my first wheelchair lasted half a block. They had a crack in the sidewalk. The front wheel was bent and damaged beyond repair. The company said no problem we'll give you another one, just like it. And then, of course, it didn't last either. It was very, very hard to get around. And of course that was before curb cuts; that was before ramps on buses. Those are very, very basic issues still don't exist in most of the world today.

Ralph Nader: And you helped develop domestic production of wheelchairs breaking the grip of the Jennings Corporation, which produced wheelchairs for flat surfaces and hospital corridors, not in the up and down pathways of countries around the world that you've gone to, to help people learn how to build sturdy, inexpensive wheelchairs, from local materials. You got the MacArthur genius prize years ago because of your work in this area. You've really, with your colleagues, have transformed the whole scene here. And you worked out of San Francisco State

University for quite a few years and now you're working out of Oakland, California. Tell us what some of the coming opportunities and challenges are, Ralf Hotchkiss.

Ralf Hotchkiss: I wish I could say it was as optimistic as it sounds from you. It's... life for a wheelchair rider in the 80% of the world that doesn't have the money, in the developing world, is very, very difficult. For example, most people with spinal cord injuries in the 80% of the world, have a life expectancy of only about two years. They die of pressure sores. They die of, initially, just out of lack of mobility. They're stuck in bed, then they die of a bed store. They just have so much trouble getting taken care of or taking care of themselves that it doesn't work and they die. We're still working on that basic problem.

Where wheelchairs have become available and yes, as a growing industry of wheelchairs has developed in developing countries. But even when they get their wheelchair, they still don't have good cushions; they still don't have good medical care for pressure sores. Lack of good cushions is life and death for somebody with a spinal cord injury and so we're working very hard on those issues, both technically and politically.

And yes, we're making progress, but we have a long way to go before the average person with a spinal cord injury in a developing country has any good any good chance of surviving for more than an average of a couple of years.

Ralph Nader: And, of course, the US is responsible for some of these injuries, with its wars all over so many countries. What they've done in Iraq and Libya and Afghanistan other places, Yemen. What is USAID [Agency for International Development] going to do under the Biden administration? They were at one time the single-largest funder of international disability projects in the world. And then under Trump, as might be expected, their funding decreased, especially for wheelchair production projects. What's the situation under Biden and USAID?

Ralf Hotchkiss: I don't know but I am holding my breath, hoping that things get radically better. They have to get radically better in order to make any progress at all.

Ralph Nader: And what about your champions in Congress? Have you had any renewed effort, since the Democrats have a close majority in Congress?

Ralf Hotchkiss: We've had some encouraging words from people, staff members in particular, in Congress. We'll see what happens next. Again, we're just beginning. But I am holding my breath, feeling that progress is coming.

Ralph Nader: What kind of hearings would you like to see in Congress?

Ralf Hotchkiss: I'd love to see hearings having to do with all aspects of life relating to schooling, jobs, educational opportunities for people with disabilities all over the world. We of course have made some progress in the west, but we have a long way to go here as well. And the

more we can work together with the growing disability movement, an amazing spontaneous eruption of progress by people, of people with disabilities all over the world, the more we can work with that movement, the more effective, whatever we do, will be.

Ralph Nader: Well, I think some of your work and that of your colleagues in places in Central America, Central Asia have been more than heroic, more than material for a documentary or the attention of a congressional hearing. Is there a chance that what you accomplished by way of inspiration to focus on all that needs to be done here, and around the world, that hasn't been done yet; will it get more media visibility? Is the media covering what you're doing?

Ralf Hotchkiss: They have over history. And the media, I assume will come back as things get going again. I would say I and those in our those in our network of disability activists around the world have really been the ones who have been inspired by the spontaneous eruption of fighting for ourselves that has happened everywhere, virtually everywhere in the world.

Ralph Nader: Listeners should know that Whirlwind Wheelchair, and you use the word "whirlwind" because your wheelchairs can do about everything but fly, they're so flexible. You have collaborative wheelchair production relationships in South Africa, Republic of Georgia, Vietnam, Mexico, Canada, China. And now you're collaborating with Peace Wheels, a custom wheelchair manufacturing business in Marrakech, Morocco in order to begin manufacturing a lightweight, rigid frame, long wheelbase wheelchair. You know, interesting thing is that when you when you go into these areas, people pick up on the innovations and they develop ways to improve wheelchair production and the wheelchair itself that you hadn't even thought of. Is that correct?

Ralf Hotchkiss: We're just stealing their great ideas. And that's what we're doing here. I started in this what now it's been 50 years ago, since I started working as a Nader's Raider on wheelchair improvement. But I had no idea that, where I would find it was not in the west, not in the wealthy world, but in the 80% of the world where people have to do what they do by themselves and for themselves and they're really doing well, considering the obstacles they have. And it's benefiting all of us all over the world, as chairs improve in significant ways that help all of us. The chairs are getting far, far more usable outdoors and disability is becoming an ordinary part of life, a survivable part of life. Whereas it was, most disabilities were a very dangerous thing to have just a few years back; it's getting better.

Ralph Nader: Where do you get your energy? That's what people may want to be asking. You get into planes. You go to the most remote areas in the world. You're totally indomitable. You have an upbeat attitude. Defeatism is not in your vocabulary, as some of the messages we get back from our listeners. Where do you get your energy from, Ralf?

Ralf Hotchkiss: From the field; from the people who are showing me how to do it. How to make chairs better. How to get chairs out there. How to make life happen in a survivable way for all of

these people with new disabilities every year. For example, when we started, people basically didn't even have chairs at all in most of the developing world, and they would die of a bedsore. Now they die of a pressure sore from their wheelchair, because they don't have the \$500 and way up cushion designs that we have in the West. We may have a coming breakthrough there. We've found a practical way finally to do as some of the thousands of dollar cushions are made in the in the West, where people take a mold of their own butt and get a cushion custom made for themselves. Expensive, but very effective. We found a way of doing it just by sitting in soft cement and taking your mold that way, and then making a cushion to that mold and modifying that cushion so that it's just what you need. That might make a huge difference to survivability of spinal cord injury in developing countries. We hope so, because the more they survive the more we survive and do well. The average life expectancy of a person with a spinal cord injury--mine was 37 years they said when I was 18 and had my spinal cord injury-- now the life expectancy of a person with spinal cord injury in the western countries is virtually normal.

Ralph Nader: So let's have you tell our listeners how they can support you in a variety of ways, including actual wheelchair funds for people who need them.

Ralf Hotchkiss: We can distribute chairs made in a good number of countries to people, especially within those very same countries by providing tools and fixtures for manufacture to small wheelchair shops. Some of our shops as small as two or three people, but they still turn out over 100 chairs a year. We're really happy to see how well it works on its own. Most of the Whirlwind Wheelchair network of builders and users is self-sufficient. It just happens on its own, once we help it get started. We provide the initial training, the initial jigs and fixtures for manufacture. Then they provide us with all the good ideas they come up with, improving on what we've done before. We're so happy to steal their good ideas.

Ralph Nader: Well, you know you sell what you've called the Whirlwind Rough Rider in the US, which is FDA approved for sale in the US and all the revenue goes to supporting Whirlwind's nonprofit mission in the developing world. Give your website and mention your volunteer form, so people can give you more detail about the various ways they can help your effort domestically and around the world. You have a volunteer form, give your website Ralf.

Ralf Hotchkiss: Sure. It's whirlwindwheelchair, all one word no caps, dot O-R-G; it's a nonprofit. whirlwindwheelchair.org. In that you'll find a volunteer form, you'll find a lot of stories of people actually making things happen in some of the most incredibly difficult situations. Doing well, going to school, getting a job, raising families. Turning life around for themselves and for the rest of us.

Ralph Nader: Do you actually have this offer, buy-one-give-one program where you'll give away one wheelchair in the developing world, for everyone purchased in the US.

Ralf Hotchkiss: It doesn't quite work that well anymore. The pandemic has changed everything in some surprising ways, but we still, when we can sell a chair here in the US, we can certainly supply more jigs and fixtures, more tooling, and more assistance to the shops, like the one we're working with in Mexico, right now, a fairly new one, so that they can get out chairs both to indigenous Mexicans even further than Mexico from this little shop. And it works a little bit on and off depending on politics, depending on the world's health situation.

Ralph Nader: It's amazing how much you get done on so few funds, and people who just want to make a tax deductible contribution they just make it to Whirlwind Wheelchair. And you can get the contact numbers by going to whirlwindwheelchair.org; is that right?

Ralf Hotchkiss: Yes, whirlwindwheelchair.org.

Well we're out of time Ralf Hotchkiss. Listeners, if you know any foundations looking for worthy grantees, there's one: Whirlwind Wheelchair. If you know any people of means looking to find some more meaning in life, direct them toward Whirlwind Wheelchair. And if they have any other questions or seeking other opportunities anywhere here and around the world, they can contact Ralf Hotchkiss. Any last things you want to say to our listeners Ralf?

Ralf Hotchkiss: Find the people in your life, who have disabilities and, if you don't know them well, get to know them. Find out how they live from day to day, how they interact with their extended families, with their employers if they have one, with their schools, with their local environment. And get inspired yourself. It's easy, it's all around us.

Ralph Nader: Well said. It's Whirlwind Wheelchair dot O-R-G.

Ralf Hotchkiss: Thank you Ralph Nader.

Steve Skrovan: We've been speaking with Ralf Hotchkiss. We will link to Whirlwind Wheelchair, as always, at Ralphnaderradiohour.com. I want to take a few moments here to address some comments we got on last week's episode with Professor Dana Fisher, who was talking about the Democrats' inability to engage their activist base. And three responses in particular seem to reach similar conclusions and I'll read bits of each of them.

First, Richard Curtis says Steve asked why does this problem exist? Meaning why can't the Democrats take advantage of their activists. And he says, the answer is that leadership of the Democratic Party is committed primarily to the capitalist class and its interests, so much so that they would rather lose elections than encourage their activist base. They're desperately afraid of those activists, because they are socialists and threaten the class interests the party exists to protect. I don't understand why this very basic fact eludes so many people. They are simply more committed to capitalist interests than they are to anything else, including winning elections.

And then Don Harris says something similar. He says the “Deathocrats”, as he refers to them, the “Deathocrats” inability to turn activism into electoral and legislative success is by design, not ineptitude. The purpose is to keep activists under control by providing a false alternative to the Republicans.

And then Bruce K, another regular listener says, I just have to theorize that look at the masses of money moved out of the working and middle classes and up to the top. The “people” have no money or time to devote to politics. All that money has gone to the top, and it is being used to buy up a fake opposition party that is paid off to lose. So Ralph, what would you say to those listeners?

Ralph Nader: I would say several things. One is the internet has changed campaign fundraising. Bernie Sanders raised huge amounts of money, an average \$27 a contribution, over the internet. He didn't have to go to one Park Avenue plutocratic fundraiser. Not one. So, that's the answer to one of the listener's comments. Second is, the people far outnumber the Democratic apparatchiks surrounding the Democratic National Committee. And therefore, they can start taking over the local Democratic committees, which often have meetings with almost nobody showing up. It's not hard to take them over, precinct by precinct. And that can be done. That's what the Tea Party people did, take over a good portion of the Republican Party. There never was more than 330,000 Tea Party activists, according to the *Washington Post*, and look what they did. They worked at the local level, took over the committees. That's the way you leverage the Democratic National Committee and get it replaced with more progressive orientation.

Now if we had anything other than a winner-take-all Electoral College travesty system, I would also add another one. If the Green Party, for example, start getting 5, 6, 7 percent of the vote, it would be like the Green Party in Germany. It would have greater leverage. The moment the Green Party got more than 5% of the vote in Germany, it got more than 5% of the members of Parliament. If you got less than 5% you got nothing. But that's when proportional representation came in, got over 5%, now 10%, 15%; they began to take over states in Germany. And now the head of the Green Party is in her late 30s and she is the most likely--I'm not saying it's going to happen, but if they look at the polls--she may well be the next Chancellor of Germany, replacing Angela Merkel. Okay, so if it doesn't happen, look how close it is and they've got all kinds of members of Parliament to pursue the Green Party platform which our listeners are quite familiar with. In terms of the environment, climate, equitable taxation, worker protections and so on. So, that's my brief response.

Steve Skrovan: So, but the general feeling seems to be that the Democratic Party are playing the Washington Generals to the Harlem Globetrotters; that they really don't want to win. And your answer is that they just need to be pressured from the outside.

Ralph Nader: Yes, they do want to win but on their own capitalist terms. It's nonsense to say they don't want to win. It's too comfortable to win their sinecures, their status, their safe districts.

But they want to win on their own terms, and we just start changing the terms. We start saying really? Well let's see. What about revising the corporate tax system? You're on record of doing it. We're going to hoist you by your own words. And you start chipping away at one area after another, as more progressives get elected to Congress and state legislatures. So it's nonsense to say they're in this business to lose. Too many perks, too much status to argue for that characterization. They want to win, but they want to continue to be loved by Wall Street, and the whole corporate infrastructure. And it's a generalization I've just given. There are some really good people in the Democratic Party, but they are a distinct minority on Capitol Hill. However, it can be chipped away. I mean nobody ever dreamed that we'd have Joe Biden pushing a human infrastructure of a couple trillion dollars. We're not talking about the bridges and public transit, the physical infrastructure. Did you ever dream that the Democratic Party, decades after Canada, would support sending an average of \$300 to every child in families numbering over 100 million people. Did you ever think that was possible? Now, they felt the rumble from the people. The agony and indignation during the COVID crisis. So now, a family making less than 80,000 a year can get \$600 for two children every month. And that was never foreseen. So drop the defeatism, people. It doesn't have any function whatsoever, even if you believe in it. And, remember listeners, it never takes more than 1% of the people, reflecting public opinion, to turn around Congress and overwhelm the corporate lobbyists. 1% of the people back home, organized, knowing what they're talking about, reflecting public opinion, and laser beaming to the 535 members of Congress.

Steve Skrovan: Well, thank you for that Ralph. And thank you Bruce, Don, and Richard for your comments. I want to thank our guests again, Dr. John Geyman and Ralf Hotchkiss. 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.

And the American Museum of Tort Law has gone virtual! Now people all over the country can take virtual tours at tortmuseum.org. And Ralph wants you to join the Congress Club. Go to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour* website, and in the top right margin click on the button labeled "Congress Club" to get your application. Join us next week on the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*, when we'll talk to two activists: one about his work on foreign policy and the other about his work on zero waste. Thank you, Ralph.

Ralph Nader: Thank you, everybody. Send a quick email to your member of Congress and say cut the multi-week vacation time and get back to work in Washington.