

## RALPH NADER RADIO HOUR EP 367 TRANSCRIPT

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

**David Feldman:** Hello, Steve.

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

**Ralph Nader:** Hello, everybody.

**Steve Skrovan:** Got a great show for you today. We recently marked the 10th anniversary of the Fukushima disaster when poor government oversight and corporate negligence joined forces with a tsunami and created a unique disaster which both natural and manmade. The immediate impacts of the explosion and meltdown were devastating. But what about the long-term effects? What have cleanup efforts accomplished so far? Is the contamination contained? That's what we'll be asking our first guest today, Peter Bradford, a former member of the US Nuclear Regulatory Commission.

And that's just the first part of the show. In the second part, one of the industries that's gotten a lot of relief from the US government lately is the fossil fuel industry. A recent report from Public Citizen details how dirty energy companies have been dipping, double-dipping and even triple-dipping into COVID[-19] relief programs since the earliest days of the pandemic. How far did this dirty energy bailout go? And what can we do to mitigate the harm? That's what we'll be asking our second guest today, Alan Zibel, who is one of that report's authors. And if we have time, Ralph will answer some of your listener questions. As always, we will check in with our corporate crime reporter, Russell Mokhiber. But first, it's been 10 years. How's Fukushima doing? David?

**David Feldman:** Peter Bradford is a former member of the US Nuclear Regulatory Commission who teaches and advises on utility regulation, nuclear power, and energy policy of the United States and overseas. Welcome back to the *Ralph Nader Rader Hour*, Peter Bradford.

**Peter Bradford:** Glad to be back, David.

**Ralph Nader:** Welcome indeed, Peter. The Fukushima disaster in northern Japan led to the closing of the many Japanese nuclear reactors, the abandonment and evacuation of tens of thousands of people around those plants. And they are still closed, they're still boiling, they're still pouring radioactive water into the Pacific. It's conceivably the greatest nuclear power plant disaster ever perhaps challenged only by the Chernobyl disaster in the Ukraine. The 10th anniversary is a time to evaluate nuclear power. What do you think [are] the lessons learned and unlearned from Fukushima here in this country?

**Peter Bradford:** Boy, there's a lot of them. For one thing, the Fukushima accident shows one of the many reasons why nuclear power is such a poor bet when it comes to combatting climate change. Look what happened in the space of three or four days during which the Fukushima

complex self-destructed. Three different reactors melted down. But a significant percentage between 10 and 20% of the world 's nuclear capacity was taken offline as a result of that and nuclear construction programs came to a halt around the world.

There's no remotely comparable then that could affect other low-carbon sources like energy efficiency or renewable. They don't have this interdependent vulnerability that nuclear power has. And of course, on top of that, we've seen that the liability limits in the US and elsewhere are frivolous compared to the actual costs of a major nuclear accident. US law limits the liability for nuclear accidents, too, in the neighborhood of \$13 billion. The latest estimates for the cost of Fukushima are now 180 billion and counting. I mean, I don't doubt that the ultimate costs when everything is taken into account of that accident will be a trillion dollars or more.

**Ralph Nader:** What would have happened, Peter, if the wind shifted toward Tokyo instead of out to the ocean right after that meltdown?

**Peter Bradford:** Oh, it would have been a much more serious event even than it was. About the only break the Japanese caught during those days when they were afflicted with the earthquake and tsunami and then the nuclear accident was that the wind consistently blew out to sea. I think roughly 80% of the radiation from the accident was blown out over the Pacific. Had the winds been toward Tokyo, had they had to consider evacuating the populations involved in an overland radiation path ending at Tokyo, there's no doubt that the death toll would have been considerably higher. You just can't evacuate a region like Tokyo without casualties resulting, not necessarily from the radiation, but just from the evacuation process.

**Ralph Nader:** 38,000,000 people lived there.

**Peter Bradford:** Yeah, exactly. And the property damage in terms of contamination and ~~in~~ land to which people couldn't return would have been far, far higher. I mean, of the hundred and some thousand people who evacuated around Fukushima at the time, I don't know, half or more have not been able to return to their homes even today, if that were true of the much greater populations...

**Ralph Nader:** It resulted in the closing of 54 of Japan 's nuclear plants all over the country. What's the situation now? Have they been reopened?

**Peter Bradford:** Very few. A handful there are back online. Some are permanently closed. Some are in what the Japanese consider extended shutdown. But I think most people assume that they won't open. And a few are in a kind of negotiation that goes on in Japan between the local authorities and the national government about the nuclear industry. And it's anybody 's guess whether they'll reopen or not.

**Ralph Nader:** We're talking with Peter Bradford, former Nuclear Regulatory Commissioner among other posts he's held. You pointed out that the impact of Fukushima led to decisions to exit nuclear power in Germany, Belgium, Switzerland, and Taiwan. What did it do in this country where nuclear power has come to an almost total stop in terms of new construction except in Georgia?

**Peter Bradford:** Well, it's interesting that the US has 20 some reactors of the Fukushima type in operation. So the safety significance of that accident for the US, not that all of them are likely to be afflicted by a tsunami, but in terms of possible failures of offsite power were pretty significant. And our Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff set out to prepare a paper on the lessons that should be learned. But a couple of their major recommendations would have been quite expensive for the industry and the commissioners of the NRC in the end decided not to adopt them. And that's because nuclear power is under so much economic pressure now. It just can't compete in today's power markets. It's desperately seeking subsidies in all parts of the US where there are markets. It's corrupted the political process in Illinois and Ohio and people are really under investigation [and] under indictment. In South Carolina they've pleaded guilty. So nuclear power is the economic trouble that it's in which is partly Fukushima related but also just has to do with the inherent high cost...

**Ralph Nader:** It can't compete with natural gas. It can't compete with renewables now. Wind power, solar power, solar panels are going down very fast in cost. And it's essentially liquidating, isn't it? I mean, more plants are closing down and the desperate effort by the industries to get the American taxpayer in Washington to subsidize renewal of the license for another 40 years for some of the remaining plants. Can you give us some of the figures here?

**Peter Bradford:** Yeah. You're absolutely right. We had at the time of the Fukushima accident 104 operating reactors in the US. We have 94 now and more than that would have closed if the industry hadn't hornswoggled state officials in Illinois and Ohio and New Jersey into propping them up with subsidies paid for by the customers. The industry is completely dependent on federal taxpayer largess for any hopes of building anymore plants and they don't have any hopes of building anymore for at least a decade, probably longer than that. The two plants in Georgia, again, are completely dependent on the customers paying three or four times the cost of getting the same energy in other ways, including other low-carbon ways. You listed some, but you could add energy efficiency and storage combined with grid management to that list. And you can create a 24-hour low-carbon or zero carbon energy system at a significantly smaller cost than relying on nuclear power. And you can do it much sooner. I mean, those are shovel-ready technologies. Nuclear is at best a decade, much more likely two or three decades in the future and too expensive even then.

**Ralph Nader:** The hypocrisy of these Republican states is striking. Florida, Georgia, South Carolina had these plants under construction. They had the state government and the federal government coerce ratepayers to continually bail out the huge cost overruns. We're talking maybe 100%, 200% cost overruns years and delay. They finally abandoned them in Florida, and I think in South Carolina. But in Georgia, they're demanding the federal government add more billions of dollars, which they have, to the still under construction Georgia nuclear plants. And then they turn around and attack Democrats in elections for being socialist. So when do you think, Peter, the environmental groups and people like Bill Gates will stop including nuclear power in the overall mix of the future energy technologies?

**Peter Bradford:** Based on their performance over the last 30, 40 years, you'd have to say never. But you know, Republicans do profess a faith in markets. And nuclear power has yet to bill a single kilowatt hour successfully in a power market anywhere in the world. So you'd think

eventually that we don't have so many plants. I mean, there have been market-oriented Republicans who've said this is too much. David Stockman, for example, when he was director of the budget under Ronald Reagan, threw in the towel on nuclear power and said it was contrary to Republican budgetary principles. So honest Republicans, yeah, there are plenty of them who would take one look at these results and walk away from it.

**Ralph Nader:** And then there are the major environmental groups who won't come down hard on nuclear power. And Bill Gates's new book, *How to Avoid a Climate Disaster*, indicates his faith in new smaller nuclear plants, which he's invested in. And yet you have people like Stanford's [University] Mark Jacobson, whose team calculated recently that about every country in the world can go to 80% renewable energy by 2030, which is just nine years from now. What is holding up the major environmental groups from basically closing down on nuclear power as an option?

**Peter Bradford:** Well, it's a sort of faith-based energy policy. Nuclear power has been in the position of saying yes, we've screwed up up to now, but we have a new technology that's just around the corner that will be brighter and shinier and cheaper and safer. And then another five or ten years go by and that technology fails also. I'm afraid these groups don't have much historical memory and they sure have an infinite capacity of putting hope and faith in nuclear power. And it's not just Mark Jacobson either. For God's sake, Amory Lovins's seminal piece was back in 1976. Dave Freeman did a paper before that that said that nuclear was not gonna be a productive answer for the US. Arjun Makhijani has published. Mark Cooper has published.. There's a slew of studies that anyone who takes a serious interest in these things can look at.

**Ralph Nader:** Well, it could be that it'll take another, heaven forbid, disaster say in the nuclear plants at Indian Point before they're closed down just 30 miles North of Manhattan. New York City is exposed to a potential earthquake risk. Isn't that true?

**Peter Bradford:** Well, yes. I mean, I think it is high time that the nuclear, the Indian Point plants did close and they are closing quite soon now. But there are other plants that were not really cited with today's standards in mind. The overall nuclear safety record is not what would have gotten from renewables and efficiency-based world. It's arguably better than coal and other fossil fuels, but there's just no reason to keep running those risks given the low-carbon potential of a whole basketful of other technologies that we have available now.

**Ralph Nader:** I thought of Amory Lovins. His argument was the most conclusive. He said, "Take all the money that's being invested in these nuclear plants. Put it in renewable energy conservation efficiency. You'll get far more megawatts, far safer, far longer enduring and far more community-based without the risks of a nuclear power plant disaster here and there."

**Peter Bradford:** Yeah. And much sooner also. I mean, you know for all the talk of a nuclear renaissance that began 10 years before Fukushima under the [George W.] Bush-[Dick] Cheney energy plan. We have not saved a single molecule of carbon with a new nuclear plant in the US in the 21st century and we spent billions of dollars trying. If that same money had gone into efficiency and renewables, we'd be far, far ahead of where we are.

**Ralph Nader:** And as you say, far quicker because the nuclear plant is taking anywhere from 10 to 15 years just to be built.

**Peter Bradford:** Or in our case, 10 or 15 years to put \$9 billion in a hole in the ground and then cancel.

**Ralph Nader** Right. Is there anything else before we conclude you'd like to say?

**Peter Bradford:** Well, just to reiterate that if the idea that nuclear energy is somehow our best answer to the climate change, the industry's only real justification for its ongoing subsidy quest, but it really is completely contrary to nuclear power's 40 years of failure to deliver on its promises.

**Ralph Nader:** By the way, just one point I forgot to ask you. The Fukushima plants are recirculating water and it's very contaminated and they're dumping it regularly in the Pacific Ocean. What does that do to the fisheries and how far is it gone toward the US coast?

**Peter Bradford:** As far as I know, the very slight traces that have reached the US coast are not health and safety issue for us. It's very much an issue in Japan and seafood products for people who fish in the area around Fukushima. Most people still won't eat it. And I think many of those products are banned from Japanese markets.

**Steve Skrovan:** I'm going to jump in here because Peter Bradford's cell phone just faded on us. And the last point he makes is very important. What he said was, "It's very much an issue in Japan and seafood products for people who fish in the area around Fukushima. Most people still won't eat it. And I think many of those products are banned from Japanese markets."

**Ralph Nader:** Thank you very much, Peter, to be continued.

**Peter Bradford:** Okay, Ralph.

**Ralph Nader:** We'll be in touch.

**Peter Bradford:** Good talking with you.

**Steve Skrovan:** We've been speaking with Peter Bradford. We will link his work at [ralphnaderradiohour.com](http://ralphnaderradiohour.com). Up next: Big Oil, gaming the system? Well, I never. We'll get to that after we 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, March 19, 2021; I'm Russell Mokhiber.

In a new book, *The Monsanto Papers: Deadly Secrets, Corporate Corruption, and One Man's Search for Justice*, Carey Gillam tells the story of Lee Johnson's landmark lawsuit against Monsanto after a workplace accident left Johnson doused in Monsanto's herbicide and facing a

deadly cancer. Johnson was the first to take Monsanto to trial drawing attention from around the world as his case became one of the most dramatic legal battles in courthouse history. There was a unanimous jury verdict after six weeks of trial. All the jurors voted that the Monsanto weed killer did cause cancer and did cause Lee Johnson's cancer. Gillam said they found that Monsanto engaged in egregious misconduct by trying to hide the risks. For the *Corporate Crime Reporter*, I'm Russell Mokhiber.

**Steve Skrovan:** Thank you, Russel. Welcome back to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*. I'm Steve Skrovan along with David Feldman and Ralph. You know Blanche DuBois, in a *Streetcar Named Desire* declared that she always depended on the kindness of strangers. Well, it turns out that the oil industry, which by this time you'd think would be fairly well established as a private enterprise, still depends on the kindness of taxpayers. David?

**David Feldman:** Alan Zibel is a journalist and the research director of Public Citizen's Corporate Presidency Project, which focuses on corporate influence and conflicts of interest in the [Donald] Trump administration. Welcome to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*, Alan Zibel.

**Alan Zibel:** Hey, thanks for having me.

**Ralph Nader:** You're welcome indeed. This can be considered part of a series of giant corporate capitalism desperately seeking socialism. And in your article, you start out saying, "When the financial crisis struck in 2008, Wall Street got bailed out while Main Street got left behind. Banking industry titans received billions in government bailouts while millions of homeowners lost their homes to foreclosures that federal assistance programs failed to prevent."

And you've just written an article for the *Public Citizen* newspaper, which all members of Public Citizen get, about what [US] Federal Reserve [the Fed] is up to again. *The New York Times* seems to be clueless on this. They keep writing articles about the chairman of the Federal Reserve wanting to create jobs and to deal with incentives for companies to moderate their assault on greenhouse gas emissions, to moderate their emissions of greenhouse gases and they don't seem to make the point you make in this article, that the Federal Reserve is actually subsidizing these fossil fuel giants. Can you explain?

**Alan Zibel:** Sure. So you know last spring when the coronavirus crisis happened, you know, the Fed's telling we almost had a market panic and the Fed stepped in and injected a huge amount of money into the financial system and kept bond markets and stock markets from collapsing, you know. And I think most people would say, okay, you know, it is good that we didn't have a gigantic financial meltdown. I think that's relatively uncontroversial, but the Fed really went very, very far. It took unprecedented steps to do something they've never done before, which was to buy corporate debt. And by buying corporate debt, they essentially, including junk bonds, which is really the lowest low-rated high-interest rate corporate debt. And when they did that, they essentially put a floor under all the debt markets. They bought tons of debt. And as a result, all corporate debt issuers had a banner year last year, refinanced their bad debt at much lower rates; corporate debt issuance went through the roof. And that in particular benefited the sectors of the economy that were doing the worst, right? So the oil industry last year was in terrible shape [with] tons of bankruptcies that are still going on in the US fracking industry. And that's

really, because the problems preceded COVID, but they were worsened by COVID for that industry. Oil prices has plummeted. They couldn't make any money anymore. So they started going bankrupt. And so what you had was the Fed policy. By purchasing corporate debt, they kind of greased the wheels for corporate debt issuance and allowed, you know, fostered a lot of industry consolidation and, you know, gave kind of a new lifeline to this industry that does so much damage to the planet as we all know.

So what the Fed did last spring, and whether it was overkill is going to be debated for a long, long time. I mean, I think you're right. If the mainstream narrative by my former colleagues in the media has been very pro-Jerome [Jay] Powell. And I think, you know, we're starting to see some questioning. We should be seeing some questioning of whether they went overboard.

**Ralph Nader:** Give us an idea of the scale here in money terms. Billions of dollars, tens of billions of corporate bonds or corporate debt?

**Alan Zibel:** Yeah. I mean, so we counted, but when we did a report last September, where we worked with Friends of the Earth and a group called Bailout Watch, and we were able to count a hundred billion dollars in new debt issuance from the start of the bailouts last March until the time we achieved the report. So that's a huge amount of debt. And the important thing to know is that that the Fed didn't buy that debt themselves, right? They bought some debt from energy companies themselves, but they didn't really – that's not kind of the important thing. Like just by buying a little bit of debt, they kind of put a floor under the whole market and with a buyer of last resort, you know, giving competence to the entire corporate debt market, essentially, that the Fed would always be there. Kind of no matter how bad your business model is, if you can sell debt on public debt markets, the Fed's got your back. So, you know, you mentioned socialism and capitalism, I mean, I'm not sure if that qualifies as capitalism, you know.

**Ralph Nader:** That's why I say corporate capitalism, which is really a form of corporate socialism.

**Alan Zibel:** Right.

**Ralph Nader:** You know, Chairman Jerome Powell has been getting good publicity because the Fed is tiptoeing into this area known as giving disincentives to companies that emit greenhouse gases or providing incentives for companies that reduce them. And I thought your article brought Chairman Powell down to earth in terms of what the Federal Reserve is really doing. And you quote in your article, “Martin Midstream [Partners L.P], a gas pipeline operator, raised nearly \$400 million as part of a debt restructuring designed to avoid seeking bankruptcy protection. Two weeks later, it awarded three top executives retention bonuses of \$100,000 each.” So is there any congressional inquiry here? Anybody following up? What kind of reaction did you get to your article?

**Alan Zibel:** So not that we've heard. I mean, there's been some oversight efforts looking into the bailouts last year when Trump was present. I haven't heard much about that lately, but I do think that there's, you know, there should be some progressive discussion about the Fed, right? I mean, I think, you know, Jay Powell gets some credit for standing up to Trump and not being a toady of

Trump like the rest of the Trump administration, but that only gets you so far, right? Like, I mean, we should be more than just not, you know, not a Trump toady, I mean, yeah.

**Ralph Nader:** As Robert Weisman, president of Public Citizen, said, “Big Oil didn’t just get a bailout. It got a lifeline to keep burning fossil fuels with impunity, pushing us closer to unfixable global warming. It makes no sense that the Federal Reserve would keep fueling climate catastrophe.” Did Public Citizen take your article and convert it into an open letter, or a demand directly addressed to Chairman Powell, take it to the next stage, so to speak?

**Alan Zibel:** So, we actually have a bunch of stuff that's going on in climate financial regulation. We're launching a whole new kind of program to push the Fed to consider issues of climate in financial regulation, both in the bailouts, which are kind of old news at this point, but in future financial regulation rulemakings. Jay Powell has been pretty terrible on bank regulation. He's been very deferential to the industry. So that's all the info you need to not reappoint him as Fed chair. But you know, the Fed has been moving very, very slowly on integrating climate into their regulatory policies, and they're finally getting there though.

**Ralph Nader:** Alan, did any press pick this up? Were you interviewed on NPR, PBS, the other commercial stations noted in newspapers? I'm always interested in that.

**Alan Zibel:** We did get some press on this one. It was not huge, but we did get some press

**Ralph Nader:** Because it's not just an article. It's a report. How can people get the Public Citizen report?

**Alan Zibel:** Yes, they can get it by going to [citizen.org/research](https://citizen.org/research) and it's right on there.

**Ralph Nader:** Thank you very much. We've been talking with Alan Zibel, Public Citizen, former reporter for *the Wall Street Journal*, so he's had quite a bit of familiarity with corporate and government intricacies. Before we close, Alan, I'll just ask Steve or David, any comments or questions? David, Steve?

**Steve Skrovan:** Yeah. Alan, I guess what amazes me is that the fossil fuel industry, and I kind of hinted at this in the opening, is so well established. It is so, you know, 150 years old that they would still be putting their hand out to the government for subsidies. It seems like, you know, the public should be truly outraged by this.

**Alan Zibel:** Indeed. And I mean, you know, this is an industry that's extremely subsidized. You know, there was another thing that we've noted in our reports on this is the fact that there was a tax giveaway to the fossil fuel industry that [Mitch] McConnell and his allies put in the CARES Act [Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act] last year. I mean, they're making out like bandits from these rescues in ways that the public is just not paying attention to. Now, there is some hope lately under [Joe] Biden, the [US] Interior Department is going to freeze new oil drilling on federal lands and offshore waters and is going to review royalties that fossil fuel companies are required to pay for accessing [and] patrolling in those areas. And those are, you know, public interest groups for many, many years ~~of~~ have called those out as way too low. You



know, there is some positive progress on that, but there's no question, it's an extremely subsidized industry.

**David Feldman:** I'd like to circle back to something you were talking about earlier. Climate change, notwithstanding and not looking at the oil industry as murdering our planet, can they survive without subsidies?

**Alan Zibel:** Right. It's a great question. Or, you know, you might refine the question a bit and say, can the US oil industry survive without subsidies? I mean, you know, the Saudis can probably survive for a while longer, but you know, we produce oil and gas in the US in the most expensive way possible. So, you know, while fracking, in addition to all its environmental damage is very, very expensive, and it only makes economic sense above a certain price. So that's, you know, kind of why they – that's why they fight so hard on subsidies is they hit a point where they just, you know, it doesn't make any economic sense to drill. And then they've got to close down their rigs, you know, in Texas and New Mexico and Colorado and such.

**David Feldman:** If you were to look, if you were to go back, like, look at the past 50 years at Exxon Mobil [Corporation] had they not had subsidies, since the oil industry is lousy with boom and bust cycles, would Exxon Mobil have survived? I don't think they had a particularly good year last year.

**Alan Zibel:** They had a terrible year. So the majors have had awful years and, you know, they're international oil giants so they can survive. They've got assets all over the globe, but the ones that are going under are sort of domestic, the domestic-only producers [that are] going bankrupt all over the place. Now we've had a bump in oil prices over the last couple of weeks, but I don't think that with the advent of electric cars and we're moving toward renewables. It's just hard to see projects like drilling in Alaska, you know, making any economic sense, let alone, obviously, it doesn't make any environmental sense, but yeah.

**Ralph Nader:** Alan, that was proven because at the auction a few weeks ago, the main bidder was the State of Alaska. It was considered so unprofitable to bid for new tracks of land for drilling.

**Alan Zibel:** Right, yeah. And so, you know, the economics of that may make just make that impossible, which is a good thing, I would say.

**Steve Skrovan:** Alan, one last question before we let you go and no problem if you don't know the answer to this. How do the subsidies to the fossil fuel industry compare to subsidies we give to the renewable fuel industry?

**Alan Zibel:** I mean, all I can say in that is that they're much lower. I mean, you know, there is the wind production tax credit that I believe just got renewed. I believe there's some solar credits, but I think it doesn't even rate. I mean, the oil industry is massively subsidized.

**Steve Skrovan:** So it kind of pales in comparison, you'd say.

**Alan Zibel:** Yeah. I mean, I feel a little bit uncomfortable because I haven't studied that directly.

**Ralph Nader:** Not only that, Steve, but the solar industry subsidies have expiration dates.

**Alan Zibel:** Right, right.

**Steve Skrovan:** It sunsets, so to speak. Ironically enough.

**Ralph Nader:** Yeah. Well, we've been talking with Alan Zibel of Public Citizen. The report came out on how the Fed by buying up the corporate debt of fossil fuel companies is subsidizing these companies and therefore facilitating the continued emission of deadly greenhouse gases that are fueling the climate crisis and violent climate change in this country. Thank you very much, Alan.

**Alan Zibel:** Okay. Thank you for having me. I really appreciate it.

**Ralph Nader:** Yes, you're welcome.

**Steve Skrovan:** We've been speaking with Alan Zibel. We would link to his work at [ralphnaderradiohour.com](http://ralphnaderradiohour.com). So, let's do some listener questions. David?

**David Feldman:** This first question comes to us from Karin Engstrom. She says, "Ralph, I wrote letters to the Democratic Party and progressive Democrats urging them to study why the right has taken over the radio airwaves and what the party can do to make a difference for the next congressional election by planning better radio communication. I suggested they read Anne Nelson's book *Shadow Network: Media, Money, and the Secret Hub of the Radical Right*; that they study the regulations and propose a law similar to the fairness doctrine, including radio time for candidates, elections and community organizations; that all stations must have local news, weather and other local information every day; that commercial stations pay a fee for their frequencies that would cover a good percentage of funds for public radio and eliminate dependence upon corporate monies. I believe in memberships and donations from the public promote community, that costs have gone up and many public radio stations are suffering. I've cc'd everyone, including my representatives."

**Ralph Nader:** Terrific performance, Karin. This is exactly the kind of listener response and action we're looking for. Please let us know whether any of your representatives have written you back. Let us know whether any other people you've written to on this issue have responded and we'll keep it going in terms of informing our listeners. It's all part of our effort to get listeners to download the letters on corporate crime, on taxing the superrich and the mega corporations. Send the letters to the senators from your state and the representative from your district and demand a response in writing. And then we'll get these members to take positions as the momentum builds up, because these are not letters that can be easily evaded and you can find these letters on [nader.org](http://nader.org).

**Steve Skrovan:** Very good. This next question comes from Bruce Mitteldorf. He says, "The utility executives spent billions of dollars on two South Carolina nuclear plants that never

generated a single watt of power pleaded guilty to federal conspiracy charges on Wednesday.” What do you think of that, Ralph?

**Ralph Nader:** That's a scandal, a big one that's been going on for a long time. They've stolen a lot of money from rate payers and the federal taxpayer. And then when they give up on the plant, because it's totally uneconomic, it hasn't been completed, all kinds of other problems with it technically, no one has to pay back. The utility doesn't have to pay back to the rate payers. The State of South Carolina that provided cover with the support of Senator Lindsey Graham doesn't have to pay back [the] federal taxpayer. It's another example of corporate immunity, corporate impunity, and the unstoppable – it seems, so far – corporate supremacy over more and more of our political economy. Think what these billions of dollars could have done if they were applied to communities throughout South Carolina to retrofit buildings and homes for more energy efficiency, good jobs, less greenhouse gases, and more money in ordinary people's pocketbooks. This is the true criminogenic nature of corporate power over our government.

**David Feldman:** This next question comes from David Hoobler and it's about citizen journalism. He writes, “Sometime back, you had a program speaker discussing individuals setting up their own local news services, possibly retired individuals. Sorry, I don't have more detail. I cannot seem to find that podcast in your list. Does this ring a bell? Can you steer me to such an episode? Thank you for all you do.” David Hoobler, author/illustrator.

**Ralph Nader:** David, you might be interested in an article by the media critic of *the New York Times*, Ben Smith, in March 8th edition, Monday of *the New York Times*, where he talks about breakout local news initiatives by younger reporters who quit their jobs and form groups like Detector [Lie Detector] and other groups and provide freelance and full-time journalism on local matters. So, it's starting to happen around the country, including subscription services. So check out Ben Smith's long article on this.

**Steve Skrovan:** This next question comes from Ray Austin. He says, “Hi, Ralph, Steve and David. I really enjoy the program you're providing. Thank you. For many years, I've been bewildered by the seeming lack of interest in the US about us. I'm referring to Canada. President Biden said the US has no greater friend or ally than Canada. We also combined as enormous trading block yet the meeting between him and our liberal \*cough, cough\* PM [Prime Minister]” That's his editorial “was muted in terms of press coverage. We are in fact, generally ignored. What gives? Is it deliberate? Is it disinterest? Are we that boring? Maybe there's something else there. Maybe it is a good thing. Gentlemen, please shine some light on this. It's quite puzzling. Stay the course. And thanks again. Your buddy, Ray from Victoria, British Columbia.

**Ralph Nader:** Well, Ray, here's some light. I had the same response that you had years ago. And so I got together with a couple Canadians, including Duff Conacher and Nadia Milleron from Stateside and we put out a book called *Canada Firsts*. Because I'd be up there speaking before a Canadian audience [and] I'd say, where is your country coming in first in science or social welfare or whatever or technology. And they'd come up with maybe six, seven, eight examples, and then they'd run out. Something you wouldn't experience in Texas if the same question was asked. So we put out this book, *Canada Firsts*. It was a 43-week bestseller. But only after a lot of Canadian publishers turned it down until McClelland & Stewart [Limited] published it on the

grounds that Canadians are too modest, that they're not interested in a book that touts their extraordinary breakthroughs in science, technology, the arts, media, communications, under sea communications. The first oil, well, by the way, was drilled in Canada. The first Children's Museum was created in Canada and other innovations. So that occurred in the 1990s. You want to check that book. Then other examples. One reason the US doesn't pay enough attention to Canada is because they don't want to bring to US citizens things that Canadians have that we could have like Full Medicare for All--everybody in/nobody out, your free choice of doctor and hospital, much saving of lives aggravation. You don't see reams of computerized billing and they ~~it~~ have better outcomes. And it's more efficient; comes in at about half the price per capita. And everybody's covered, unlike the US, which has double the price per capita in Canada and there's still 80 million people in the US either uninsured or underinsured. So they don't like to show this because, you know, it provides powerful arguments for consumer and citizen groups in the US.

And then the third is that the Canadians don't come down to the US and talk about their country enough. CBC [Canadian Broadcasting Corporation] has an office in Washington, DC, where they relay news about the US to Canada, but there just isn't enough Canadian effort. I've often thought some Canadians want to take bus tours through various communities in New England and elsewhere to tell Americans how effective their single payer is. It would not only be a service for US consumers, but also provide a little more legitimate pride for a country that is indeed accessibly modest about its social safety net and other advances beyond that of the United States. Canadians actually brought the idea of a credit union to New Hampshire from Quebec about a century or so ago, which now has spread all over the United States with about 70 million members in credit unions. And that's just one example.

**Steve Skrovan:** Ralph, listeners, Susan Vaughan asks, "Can states intervene and pass laws against these Medicare dis-Advantage plans since technically they aren't Medicare or federal program?"

**Ralph Nader:** Well, since the money for the Medicare dis-Advantage plans run by Aetna [Inc.], United Healthcare [Service LLC] and other profiteering insurance companies comes from the federal government, there's a preemption of the states being able to interfere or to regulate that. However, there might be an overlap in terms of deceptive advertising, where state consumer agencies might be able to have overlapping jurisdiction against the remarkably unenforced, deceptive advertising of these companies, luring elderly people into these plans.

**Steve Skrovan:** All right, very good. This comes from Mr. Gian Pauletto. He says, "Dear *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*. Have you considered inviting Bill Gates onto the show to discuss his new book, *How to Avoid a Climate Disaster*? It challenges some of our thoughts about dealing with this problem. For example, like Paul Hawken's drawdown project [Project Drawdown]. It doesn't forbid the use of nuclear efficient energy. A touchy subject with Ralph Nader and probably some of the show's listeners, but nevertheless, something needing more discussion. So Ralph, let's discuss. What do you think?"

**Ralph Nader:** We have no problem inviting Bill Gates on the show. We'll send him an invitation, send his publisher an invitation. Unlikely they'll accept it, but it's a good idea. Bill Gates thinks nuclear fission should be part of the mix, and that's a disaster. Nuclear power is

uneconomic, uninsurable, unsecure. Having dealt with radioactive waste disposal for hundreds of thousands of years, and in many ways, cannot exist without massive infusions of taxpayer subsidy over the 15 years or so it takes to build a nuclear plant. We can't wait that long in the first place and the same money can produce far more megawatts through solar energy, wind power and save megawatts by retrofitting buildings and improving transportation fuel efficiency.

**David Feldman:** Hey, for those of you want to know even more, refer to our discussion with Peter Bradford, former Nuclear Regulatory Commissioner, who has been following this since the '70s. I happen to notice Ralph on CNN [Cable News Network] after the Texas freeze out, Arctic freeze. Anderson Cooper on CNN, who has Bill Gates on his show all the time asked I think Beto O'Rourke, who was denigrating Greg Abbott's, rightfully denigrating Greg Abbott's response blaming the Green New Deal, this thing that does not exist. But Anderson Cooper says, "Well, what about nuclear?" And Beto O'Rourke says, "Well, I think that should be part of the mix." And it just seems like this message has not gotten through to the mainstream media and celebrities like Bill Gates, who can have a relationship with Anderson Cooper and that platform on CNN, they hold sway.

**Ralph Nader:** Well, it could be invincible ignorance on the part of the Democrats, but I doubt it. There's just too much disclosure of how economically disastrous nuclear power plants are and not to mention that they cannot exist from beginning to end without massive infusions of taxpayer subsidies. And one nuclear plant disaster like Fukushima or Chernobyl and you've got potentially an area the size of Pennsylvania radioactively uninhabitable. So do you want to risk that? Do we want to support a technology whose only purpose is to boil water? There are many other ways to boil water to produce steam without having the risks of uninsurable radioactive disasters occurring because of nuclear power plant failures or exposure to earthquakes or heaven forbid, even sabotage.

**Steve Skrovan:** Well, thank you for your questions. Keep them coming in the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour* inbox. We're going to close the show here by introducing a new feature that is on the nader.org and Ralph, this is things that people who are familiar with the show know that we've talked about, but you started a new section on your website called *Reporters' Alert*. Tell us about what that is and what some of the stories you want to alert reporters to are.

**Ralph Nader:** Well, if you can't get through to reporters and editors these days, it's harder than ever in an internet age, I thought we'd propose great stories that are either not covered at all or little covered on a website so that they can come to the website. We can't reach them, but if they know that periodically they can check in with *Reporters' Alert*, they'll find some very, very powerful stories that they have been missing. We're already up to over 15 such stories and more will be added. If you want to find out what these stories are all about, go to [nader.org/reporters-alert](http://nader.org/reporters-alert).

To give you some examples, Steve and David, the Pentagon has still not been audited violating a 1992 federal statute requiring all federal agencies and departments to present auditable data about their budget to the government accountability office [GAO] of the US Congress. That's the largest single operating budget in the federal government by far – the Pentagon budget. It needs to be dug into by reporters.

5,000 people a week die because of preventable problems in hospitals in the United States. 5,000 a week, 250,000 a year. Who says so? The Johns Hopkins [University] School of Medicine report in 2016, peer reviewed. And when it was released, it was a small one-day story. What? 5,000 a week. That really deserves many stories on an ongoing basis.

Congress works three days a week. Where did that start? Congress is supposed to be paid to work full time. One reason they don't do enough public hearings on the real problems affecting the American people and what these agencies and departments are doing in the executive branch is they don't work Monday and Friday. They fly in Tuesday morning and fly out Thursday afternoon. And in between, they spend quite a few hours going to private nearby offices where they dial for campaign dollars. That's another story.

**Steve Skrovan:** Yeah. It seems to me like Congress is more like a retirement home. You know, you show up for a few meetings and then the rest is just fun activities.

**Ralph Nader:** Very unproductive. If it wasn't for certain requirements like producing a budget, which is proposed by the executive branch, when it's supposed to be proposed by the [US] House of Representatives under the Constitution, their output has been very, very low compared to previous congresses.

How about this? Uncollected taxes are between \$400-600 billion a year according to the IRS [Internal Revenue Service]. But the IRS has had its budget slashed by the Republicans since 2011, aiding and abetting corporate tax evasion. So they don't have the auditors to do the audits of these complex global corporations or super wealthy people. And the budget now is so strained that it takes days just for people to get through on the phone to the IRS to ask pressing questions about their own personal tax obligations. That is something that is now on the backs of the Democrats. And a big story is why is Chairman Richard Neal of the House Ways and Means Committee not expanding the IRS budget? He comes from progressive Western Massachusetts, and there's no heat on him to do something different than what his predecessor Republican chair did to starve the IRS.

How about this? Billing fraud in the healthcare industry alone is about a billion dollars a day. A day, a billion dollars. Who says so? Well, the usual conventional estimate is 10% of all healthcare expenditures go down the drain in this fashion. A lot of corporate crime here. \$60 billion is taken from Medicare alone every year by corporate billing fraud and abuse. And the 10% figure has been documented by the leading expert, the applied mathematician at Harvard [University], Professor Malcolm Sparrow, who says to me months ago, that's the lowest figure he would estimate. It could be much higher. So it's \$350 billion a year. That's about half the Pentagon budget, and it's not even a news story. It's not even an issue for political candidates running for congressional or White House offices year after year. It just goes on and on. And I think we've said enough now other than to abbreviate. You hear about all these sanctions on foreign governments, foreign potentates, foreign groups, that the White House doesn't like. Who enforces these sanctions? Are they all legal? What happens if they fall on millions of innocent people like Iranians? They can't get adequate medicines or adequate medical catheters and other things that are prescribed. That's not even talked about.

So we have a lot of good stories right across the board for any number of reporters, big media, small media, independent media, to dig into and we're not waiting to get our calls back from these reporters and editors. You can now come to us at [nader.org/reporters-alert](http://nader.org/reporters-alert).

**David Feldman:** Ralph, tell me how it's different from when your career first started in the late '60s through the '70s. Is it harder to get a reporter's attention these days?

**Ralph Nader:** Tremendously harder. You used to be able to call a reporter. They would be at their typewriter at their desk. They wouldn't have to post all kinds of news at 11, one, and three the way they do now on the internet. They have to meet a certain deadline, may be five, six o'clock for the next day's newspapers. They'd pick up the phone and you'd have an exchange back and forth. Email doesn't do it. It's too cluttered. You often don't get responded to. It's filtered out, whatever. You can't get reporters on the phone with a few exceptions. I would say 10% of the reporters still do it the old fashioned way, like David Fahrenthold of *the Washington Post*. And I asked him, "David, why do you pick up your phone when most of your colleagues don't?" He said, "That's how I get my stories." I said, "That's so obvious that years ago it wouldn't have been uttered by a reporter." Editors are even more difficult. Yet when you get them, they say, "Oh, thank you for calling. Call us anytime." Yeah. Day after day, trying to get through. Who has the time?

**David Feldman:** Can our listeners help here? Can they take action? Can they go to [nader.org](http://nader.org), go to *Reporters' Alert*, find a story that seems to relate to them or interest them and ding their local reporters?

**Ralph Nader:** Great suggestion. In fact, here's one for people in New York State. Governor [Andrew] Cuomo has said there's going to be a \$16 billion state deficit with negative effects on education, mass transit, healthcare, you name it. It just so happens that New York State since 1982, has collected and rebated a sales tax on stock transactions at the level of \$350 billion, estimated by Jim [James] Henry, former economists for McKinsey[ & Company], who is leading the fight to get the state just to keep what it rebates. And last year, what it rebated was about what the state deficit was going to be this year. We're talking \$14-16 billion. Now the listeners to this program, especially if they get up early enough on WBAI in New York City, can call the local press and say, "Hey, why aren't you covering this story? You can't be afraid of Wall Street and the brokers. This is a fraction of 1% sales tax when we have to go into stores in New York and pay 8% sales tax for the necessities of life. Come on, fulfill the people's right to know, write an article, write a feature, interview the assembly people and the state senators who are supporting the retention of this rebate, but can't get Governor Cuomo to respond favorably."

**Steve Skrovan:** Would you invite our listeners to suggest stories themselves that you can put on the *Reporters' Alert*?

**Ralph Nader:** We can do that if it covers corporate power and government surrender. That's sort of the area that we're focusing on right now. Obviously the potential list of local state, regional, national, international is endless, but we'd like hot stories that aren't covered dealing with corporate crime, fraud, abuse, and government non-regulation, government complicity, government non-response.

**Steve Skrovan:** Well, there you have it, people. Go to [nader.org](http://nader.org), click on *Reporters' Alert*. You'll see suggestions of stories there and call your local reporters to have them take action. Have numbers start reporting on this stuff. Thank you very much.

**Ralph Nader:** You're welcome.

**Steve Skrovan:** I want to thank our guests again, Peter Bradford and Alan Zibel. For those of you listening on the radio, that's our show. For you, podcasts listeners, stay tuned for some bonus material we call "The Wrap Up". A transcript of this show will appear on the *Ralph Nader Rader Hour* website soon after the episode is posted.

**David Feldman:** Subscribe to us on our *Ralph Nader Rader Hour* YouTube channel. And 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:** And Ralph has provided two separate form letters to send to your representatives demanding they take action on corporate crime and taxing the rich. Just click on the clearly marked boxes on the right-hand corner of the *Ralph Nader Rader Hour* website and it's all laid out there for you to fill in and personalize any way you want. Go to [ralphnaderradiohour.com](http://ralphnaderradiohour.com) and take action.

**David Feldman:** And to support The American Museum of Tort Law, check out their online shop at [store.tortmuseum.org](http://store.tortmuseum.org). They have autographed books, "Flaming Pinto" coffee mugs, and other unique gifts for all you, lawyers, law students, paralegals and tort fans out there.

**Steve Skrovan:** And for an independent news source that believes people are more important than corporations, go to [populous.com](http://populous.com) to read or subscribe to the Progressive Populist.

**David Feldman:** The producers of the *Ralph Nader Rader Hour* are Jimmy Lee Wirt and Matthew Marran. Our executive producer is Alan Minsky.

**Steve Skrovan:** Our theme music *Stand Up, Rise Up* was written and performed by Kemp Harris. Our proofreader is Elisabeth Solomon. Our associate producer is Hannah Feldman.

**David Feldman:** Join us next week on the *Ralph Nader Rader Hour* when we'll be joined by Steven Donziger, a man who took on Chevron and is now a corporate political prisoner. Thank you, Ralph.

**Ralph Nader:** Thank you, everybody. And as Steve said, those letters are designed to make you have a bigger impact on Congress. They can't fluff those letters off. They're too detailed. So go with the corporate crime letter to get corporate crime hearings and federal corporate crime reform.