

RALPH NADER RADIO HOUR EP 330 TRANSCRIPT

Steve Skrovan: It's the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*.

[Music] Stand up, stand up, you've been sitting way too long.

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

David Feldman: Happy 4th of July.

Steve Skrovan: Thank you very much; to you, too. And we also have the man of the hour, Ralph Nader. Hello, Ralph.

Ralph Nader: Hello. Read the Declaration of Independence. It has resonance for today's political scene like you can't believe.

Steve Skrovan: And Ralph, at the opening of the show today, you wanted to read something else to us that is significant; what is that?

Ralph Nader: Yes, this is a poem [in the form of a letter to the editor] by a local poet in Litchfield County, Connecticut that was printed in *The Lakeville Journal* [by] Lyn Mattoon, L-Y-N M-A-T-T-O-O-N. And it really is quite contemporary. Let me read "How Have we gone astray? Let me count the ways" for our listeners. And I'm starting now:

We've traded public good for private gain.
Let forests fall, let acid rain.
Let media supposed to liberate
Voice resentment, rage, and hate.
We've traded science for pleasanter views.
Replaced knowledge with false news.
For climate change we've no solution;
We've blown through every resolution.
We've let families, fleeing murder and despair,
Fester in detention, mothers here, their children there.
We've let corporate profit be the ruling creed,
Promoting envy, pride, and greed,
Believing all the money made
Will trickle down to cooks and maids.
As for racial matters, let me explain,
It is us versus them all over again.
Justice has not rolled down like waters.
We've betrayed our sons and daughters.
Left a legacy of fear and division.
How does that match Martin's vision?
This road we've travelled is not good.
It's led us to a dark, dark, wood.

It is time to find another way,
Where truth and justice have their say."

End of poem by Lyn Mattoon, *Lakeville Journal*.

Steve Skrovan: Well, thank you very much for that, Lyn. That's kind of what we try to do in the show every episode. And in that spirit, I'm going to put topics on the table. Many of us complain about the inefficiency of the government, how the government is gridlocked and it feels like nothing ever gets done, but it turns out this isn't happening by mistake. This is the result of a small group of billionaires working hard to make the government ineffective. Why make the government ineffective? Well, so that people will think it's useless and reduce the power of that government. With a weak government, the super wealthy can pollute the environment and exploit people without consequence.

Our first guest, Daniel Newman, explains this in his nonfiction graphic novel, *Unrig: How to Fix Our Broken Democracy*. Mr. Newman refers to the people trying to thwart democracy as the "radical right" or "wealth hoarders". He explains that wealth hoarders are trying to get rid of popular government programs such as public schools, minimum wage laws, Social Security, the Environmental Protection Agency, and all forms of government assistance. They want to get rid of these programs, not for the public good, but for their own good. And because these programs are so well-liked by people across the political spectrum, the "wealth hoarders" are using secretive methods to target them. We'll learn more from Daniel Newman about what we can do to fight this corruption of government.

And along those same lines, in the second half the show, we will talk about corruption, but in a different area, as we welcome back Dr. John Geyman who we've had on a number of times to talk about our crazy for-profit healthcare system. This time, Dr. Geyman will help us dig into the corruption and fraud that are innate to our hospitals. The need for true universal health care especially in the age of corona virus has become even more obvious. And Dr. Geyman just released a new book on this called *Profiteering, Corruption and Fraud in U.S. Health Care*. In between, as always, we'll take a short break and check in with our corporate crime reporter, Russell Mokhiber. But first, let's find out why, if you want to know what a politician stands for, find out who is paying him. David?

David Feldman: Daniel Newman is a national expert on government accountability and money in politics. He's the President and Co-founder of MapLight, a nonprofit that promotes transparency and political reform. Mr. Newman has led MapLight from a 2005 startup to an established national resource. He wrote the non-fiction graphic novel, *Unrig: How to Fix Our Broken Democracy*. Welcome to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*, Daniel Newman.

Daniel Newman: Thank you. It's a pleasure to be here.

Ralph Nader: Welcome indeed, Daniel. Well, let's get to your new book called *Unrig*. And you're not only talking about how to fix our broken democracy, as you put it, but you actually experienced both a failure and then a short while afterwards, a success in your hometown in California, which is?

Daniel Newman: Which is Berkeley, California here in the San Francisco Bay Area.

Ralph Nader: Well, tell our listeners what you tried to do about big money controlling government and what happened in two stages.

Daniel Newman: So back in 2003, I was inspired by states like Maine and Arizona that were getting big money out of politics and having publicly funded elections. And I thought, let's do this in the city where I live in Berkeley. And I got together with a campaign partner and we got a measure written and we lobbied the city council and we got a ballot measure question on in 2004. And I was so excited because I would finally have accomplished something significant. But you know what Ralph, the measure failed. And I was devastated for about a year. But from that and talking to a lot of other activists around the country trying to change the system, I learned that it takes a long time sometimes to make these changes and that one failure sets up for success in the future. And then in 2016, we were able to put the measure on the ballot again and have success. And so now publicly funded elections is part of the city's constitution.

Ralph Nader: How in the world did you lose the first referendum in a city like Berkeley? Who opposed you?

Daniel Newman: So, the thing is, at the local level, a lot of people think their politics are not controlled by many even if they are. A lot of people think Washington, D.C., has a problem; my state capital has a problem. But they don't understand that even at the local level, it can cost 40, 50, \$60,000 or more to run for school board or run for city council. And so we need to do a better job the first time around in really exposing that and that's what we did the second time around.

Ralph Nader: And what was the measure of victory in 2016?

Daniel Newman: We had a two-thirds vote in support, so overwhelming difference. And one difference that happened over the last 15 years is 15 years ago, money in politics, and political corruption were not on the national radar as a big issue, but now they are.

Ralph Nader: And what effect in the last four years has it actually had on Berkeley City Council, Berkeley politics, and the people in Berkeley?

Daniel Newman: Many people have run for office and won that simply wouldn't have had access to capital before to run. They were community leaders, but the grassroots couldn't get the funding together. So the makeup of the city council is much more representative of what people want and you have the city taking interest in things that are not just what the wealthier neighborhoods and real estate developers want.

Ralph Nader: Well, beside real estate developers, who are the other corporate commercial interests that were swinging the city government one way or another against the people?

Daniel Newman: You know in Berkeley, it is mostly the real estate and developer interests and that's true in medium size and small cities across the country. It's really at the state level and the federal level we see the drug companies and we see the health insurance companies, the banks and so many other industries that really control things.

Ralph Nader: What about commercial interests adversely affecting the environment in Berkeley?

Daniel Newman: I think what happened is, sort of, just a lack of general moving Berkeley forward really to the front of where it should be. I mean, Berkeley was a leader back in the day in terms of

one of the first curbside recycling in the country and really had somewhat lagged as other cities moved ahead. But now I think, without dependence on special interest money that Berkeley is going to move ahead now.

Ralph Nader: Usually, you know, the school systems are run by people who have contacts with local banks and contractors and there is a lot of procurement fraud around the country because, you know, schools buy a lot of things. Is that a factor in big money twisting the misuse of taxpayer dollars or competitive bidding for the best service or product for the schools?

Daniel Newman: I think that the system we have now where even at the local level of school board, you're dependent on people with wealth, like, it creates that kind of distortion. In my book, I tell the story of a candidate named Paul Perry who ran for Congress in Pennsylvania and he was a real community leader, but he just couldn't compete on the fundraising front. And then I contrast that with the City of Seattle [where] Teresa Mosqueda, candidate, also a community leader, was able to get democracy vouchers, which they have in Seattle--public funding from the city from citizens--and she was able to be elected and get on the city council. And that's the kind of reform that makes a difference.

Ralph Nader: Do you think the average citizen in Berkeley knows about this referendum and its effects?

Daniel Newman: I think no. I think that in Berkeley and many other cities with public funding, it's not widely known. I think the Seattle model of democracy vouchers does much better in that regard. So in Seattle, every citizen, every voter gets four coupons in the mail for \$25 each and they can give those coupons to candidates for city council and mayor and other city offices. And so not only does it provide public funding for these candidates to get elected, but there's also this marketing component because these vouchers all come in the mail so people know about the program.

Ralph Nader: Three or four years ago there was a big controversy in Berkeley about saving the post office from being sold off as a building to real estate interests. The husband of Senator Dianne Feinstein was involved all over California in basically taking post office buildings as the post office downsized and making a bundle; what happened there?

Daniel Newman: So that was a great victory for the public in the city. The city council, under pressure from lots of protests from citizens, created a civic zone that included the blocks that the post office was in for only nonprofit and government use. And the post office actually sued to overturn that but the city prevailed, and so the post office remains.

Ralph Nader: Do you think Berkeley has got an undeserved reputation of being radical, you know, out of the '60s, the Free Speech Movement, University of California, Berkeley? It had this reputation of being really left and radical. What's the reality?

Daniel Newman: I think the reality is it's certainly progressive and liberal by any measure when you look at the rest of the country. But I do think that, like, activism now is not as geographically confined. And look at the national, actually the worldwide protests we're seeing for racial justice right now. And I think it's really what particular subset of the population, both in Berkeley, but also everywhere, is involved in these issues.

Ralph Nader: Let's get to your book, *Unrig*, because I have a question--most interviewers, and I hope you get a lot of interviews, NPR, PBS and Pacifica on your book--why would you want to write a comic book--this is a graphic novel technically--why would you want to write a comic book on fixing a broken democracy and analyzing how it's broken written for adults?

Daniel Newman: I think that there is this misperception that the issues of democracy are just too complicated. So we've talked about money in politics. But there's also voting rights; there's gerrymandering; the electoral college. All these things are critically important to basic functions of our lives in terms of: do we have healthcare; are we able to afford a home; can we afford to send our kids to college? Yet people don't necessarily see the connections between those abstract topics and the reality of their lives. And so that's why I wrote a graphic novel, a non-fiction comic book. It's an entry point to understand these things. It's for adults, as you say, and there's so many excellent non-fiction prose books out there, these thick, important, valuable books. But I wanted to write something different and something that's an entry point that's inspiring, that's fun to read, that has the stories of real people that are bringing change about, as well as giving you clarity into how our country is actually broken and what the solutions are to fix it.

Ralph Nader: Well, we're talking with Daniel Newman who is the author of this graphic novel; is it ever full of factual information, listeners. It's called *Unrig*. And just to use your own words, Daniel, you say "This book may come as a surprise given my profession, but I don't love reading books about democracy. Too often they are dry and pessimistic. I wanted to write a book that I would be excited to read myself. That's why I wrote a graphic novel, *Unrig*. It's fast paced with art by George O'Connor that's engaging and fun. It's a comic book written for adults. It covers the biggest concepts in our democracy, meticulously researched with unprecedented clarity." Even if you do say so yourself, right, Daniel? [Ralph laughs] Okay, so isn't this good for teenagers, too?

Daniel Newman: It's fantastic for teenagers, for college students, and for adults of any age. And so I think sometimes a misperception, like, a comic book has to be [for the] young, but the book market has really changed and there are so many graphic novels for adults; this is a great entry point to learn. And it's really engaging when you see the characters right there in the story, when you can see gerrymandering explained on a map instead of trying to explain it in prose. And so I wrote this book really to create these entry points to give people clarity and optimism.

Ralph Nader: Well, you met one of my tests, which I'm going to tell you in about a minute, but is this book, *Unrig*, also good for comedians? Because Steve Skrovan and David Feldman are professional comedians.

Daniel Newman: Is it good for comedians? Well, Ralph, it's good for everyone. But I do think people will get some chuckles out of the text. The illustrator of this book, George O'Connor, is just a fantastic artist and he found all sorts of ways to make it come alive. Like for example, in the section on Seattle, if you look closely at one of the pictures, there's Bigfoot peeking out from one of the trees. And so there are all sorts of visual treats like that throughout the book.

Ralph Nader: Okay, there you are. Well here is the test you met. When I got the book, it's a hardback, by the way, it's very good in the hands and very readable, and I said to myself, well, is Daniel going to leave the reader hanging? Because how many books that we all read, Daniel, about democracy where they don't really end up telling you what to do. They just tell you what's wrong and then they end up saying "If only the people will rise and become more active," and that's it. So I turn to your book, it's page 237, and it starts out, "Join a group." It's prefaced by the headline

"The Next Steps for You." And you say, "Join a group that's working to unrig the rules of politics. Fixing our democracy is not something you can do by yourself. It's something to do with other people. Visit my website, unrigbook.com for a list of some groups to get involved with. If there is not already a group in your state or your town, start one yourself. Even two people is enough to get started. But the more committed people you have, the greater the likelihood of success. It's important to find a group where you can meet other people in person. Organizing by email and by phone is helpful, too, but as a supplement to in-person meetings. Seeing other people face-to-face builds the trust and support needed to sustain a group effort." Well, you know we're now in social distancing with COVID-19 and this was written obviously before the COVID-19 came to our shores. But what's interesting about this is I keep telling our listeners, if only 1% of the people or less organize Congress Watchdog groups representing broad public opinion in their congressional district, and they open up an office with two full-time people, and they support it with hundreds of hours of volunteer time--that's 1% or less of the people in each congressional district--they can defeat almost any corporate power interest in Congress, and turn Congress around real fast for full Medicare for All, free choice of doctor and hospital, full living wage, cracking down on corporate crime, cleaning elections/reform, changing our military foreign empire system, and concentrating public budgets on domestic necessities such as public works or infrastructure, on and on. Wouldn't you agree? One percent or less. By the way, 1% is about two and a half million adults spread among 435 congressional districts. And I wrote this little paperback which you may have read a few years ago called *Breaking Through Power: It's Easier Than We Think*. And I get from your book, that you agree with that. And that people often create mountains and get intimidated by taking on Congress, taking on the powerful interests. But we the people are the ultimate sovereign and these politicians, no matter how crooked they are in Congress, they want your votes more than they want money from corporations; because they want money from corporations to intimidate their opponents, rig the system as you outlined. What do you say about all that?

Daniel Newman: That's absolutely true. And one of the themes of the book is how few people you really need to make a difference. So I wish I knew this starting out, Ralph, more than 15 years ago. Like, what does it mean to run a campaign? What do you actually need to change a lot? You don't read about the heroes and sheroes doing this in the news media. And so that's what this book provides. So it has a whole section on the people in Seattle--the 10 people; that's all it took--10 people to get started with what eventually became a democracy voucher system. And it shows their ups and downs, and it shows that they're having a fundraiser in a bar and then raising \$5,000. So it really breaks it down to the specific things that are needed. I mean, in Berkeley where we changed the city constitution to have publicly funded elections, it took three or four of us lobbying the city council for about three years. And then we had 15 people on the steering committee. And then we had about 100 volunteers. And that's something we put together.

Ralph Nader: If I may interrupt you, you see listeners, how it all starts. It all starts with a few people and then more people. But it even ends in success with just a few people as long as they represent the values and public opinion of the American people in their district. And this divide and rule tactic by the two-party duopoly--because they both profit by dividing and ruling and focusing on the divisive issues, there are far, far more issues that are supported by conservative and liberal families all over the country. Don't they want a living wage? Do they want to be denied healthcare benefits after they paid premiums? Don't they want their roads, schools, drinking water systems and public buildings repaired, public transit, on and on. So this book focuses on how you can get things started and you don't have to have a half a million bucks or 50,000 people to get it underway. In fact, look what happened in Richmond, California, right, Daniel? Just a handful of

people took over the city council and changed things for the better and tamed some of the pollution from that Chevron Refinery; isn't that right?

Daniel Newman: Absolutely. A revolt against Chevron and it just took organizing. And then the question of organizing and what does that mean; my book breaks it down and it's really the emphasis on the fixing concrete steps you can do. On my website unrigbook.com, I also have how do you actually get plugged in to local groups that are already in your community.

Ralph Nader: What I like about this book is it has footnotes at the end and an index. I don't know many graphic novels that have an index in addition to your very generous acknowledgments. But going back to this graphic novel format, it's really so clear and so fast-moving and you don't sacrifice detail. There's a lot of factual detail about how they rig the system, the few deciding for the many. Okay, so Steve and David, weigh in here. I'm sure you're salivating.

Steve Skrovan: Well, Daniel, I'm curious just on the creative side, the kind of work that goes into doing a book like this when you're working with an artist and how best to get across concepts without the pictures being distracting, how they work together. How did you work with your artist on that?

Daniel Newman: So one of the great things about the comics medium is you can have the text and the pictures even be different and it brings more meaning that way. So I would come up with the script, which is the text of the book, and George O'Connor, this terrific artist that I worked with, would come up with ways to illustrate. So for example, there are stories of states and cities that have publicly-funded elections. And in that chapter, he has me as the narrator, as a magician flipping over cards in different states. And then it goes in the next chapter to a car in a time machine like in *Back to the Future* that goes back to the year 1888 when the U.S. adopted a ballot that was printed by the government instead of by political parties and making elections more fair. So there's all sorts of great art that can be done with that.

Steve Skrovan: Yeah, so you could take the art and take the idea a little bit farther with the art as opposed to it being, sort of, like, a talking-heads equivalent of a static talking-heads documentary.

Daniel Newman: Exactly. And then you see people in the book like Alice Paul, who was from the National Women's Party, who in 1917 was part of the first group ever to picket the White House for women's suffrage; you don't just read that as like a historical driving; you see her picture there demonstrating, that's part of the whole chapter on the right to vote and voter suppression and expanding the franchise over the years.

Ralph Nader: Daniel, let me ask a forthright question here. We've all faced this. You can put all kinds of action manuals in people's hands; you can put it in people's hands who agree with you, who have the temperament, the skill, determination, and it doesn't happen. So I have seen all over the country a pronounced decline in civic engagement. People do not turn out. They don't turn out for town meetings in New England. They don't turn out for marches. We used to have 200,000 people turn out to protest the criminal war of Iraq by Bush and Cheney. And it dwindled down to 2007, we had a rally and the war was going on and people were being slaughtered, and trillions spent, and soldiers dying, and civilians in much greater number, and we got 500 at Lafayette Park. And you see it everywhere. I mean, I sort of measured it. There is a withdrawal into the home, into the iPhone, into the computer, into the television set, and they don't even use front porches anymore. There's a group that's trying to encourage that because the old architecture of houses

around the country had front porches. They don't sit in front porches anymore. Tell me. I mean, I know you want to be optimistic, but we have to be realistic. It's getting worse and worse. And look at the results in Washington. Look at some of the public officials who we never dreamed would have been elected, not to mention selected by the Electoral College, Donald Trump. It's just getting worse and worse. So how do you deal with the issue of civic motivation in their own interests?

Daniel Newman: I think that, Ralph, we really have to take a cold-eyed look about, like, what are the access points for people to get involved. I mean, right now with the protests against police violence in favor of racial justice, this is like huge waves of activism across the country and these protests are happening, so it's not a lack of desire. But when you look at like what are the access points, I think that as a movement in terms of changing our country, there really need to be more of them. And this book is designed to be an entry point for what does it mean to actually change things. Like, what does that actually look like; how do you do it, and what are the solutions that would make a difference?

Ralph Nader: You know, there was a poor people's campaign led by Reverend Barber from North Carolina, and this was before the George Floyd homicide, well before, about three years ago. And they would go to one town and one city after another well prepared. They would March publicly [with] great placards; they'd connect with local clergy, because it was driven by progressive clergy. And they went to Washington, D.C., for example; they got no press. They'd go to other cities, no press because they were peacefully protesting. It was called the Poor People's Campaign. So nothing happened until a police violence flared again recently. And one thing that was quite reflective is when you talk to the clergy who were part of this Poor People's Campaign, they couldn't get poor people to come out and support them. So really dig into the lack of civic motivation problem here. Dig in.

Daniel Newman: So over decades, the amount of civic education required in schools has tapered off to very little in many places. And you look at . . . like, people are not being taught just like what are the . . . how does actual government actually work; how do people banding together actually change the system. And of course, back in the 1960s, for example, you saw in society examples of mass movements creating change. And so I think you have people for decades now, like, both the younger people and also older people are kind of forgetting, like, what are the tools and levers that are needed. Toward the end of my book, I put fixing our broken democracy in the context of movements for the environment, for civil rights and for racial justice to show people, yes, there are so many examples in our country's history where we've come together despite our differences to make these changes. But that messages need to get out more and there's no silver bullet about my book, *Unrig*, is meant to contribute to that.

Ralph Nader: That's a good point. In our schools, although the textbooks are getting a little better, we didn't hear much about civic accomplishments other than the formal ones that, led say, to the Constitution and its derivatives. But we just learned far more about wars, far more about flamboyant elections. But it doesn't give youngsters a sense of what their civic duties are as youngsters. Youngsters have revealed examples. Look at on climate change, the youngsters are coming forward, but they don't have enough examples. The other thing I think you might want to add is that I've noticed over the years, the commercial and public media are excluding the activities of citizen groups like I haven't seen since the 1950s. We would not have gotten anywhere without the media covering the auto-safety battle in Congress and subsequent struggles that led to so many good laws, and health, and safety advances in occupational environment, workplaces, and so on.

They've been excluded now. Once in a while, they're trotted out to give a quote on a political issue, but they've been excluded and that's true locally. Locally in the 1960s, a civic leader would get on the evening news. And because the civic leader got on the evening news, when the civic leader had a press conference, people came. And that person was a factor. You almost never see that now. The shredding of the news into sports, weather, you know, flash here, flash there [with] very little real news, has contributed to this lack of elaboration of what happens when a few people get together, and they reflect public opinion, and they can actually change things against what were considered overwhelming odds. What else would you add to this issue of how to deal with the lack of civic motivation?

Daniel Newman: I think that one of the things to solve this very big problem is to put forward media and stories where people can actually see themselves. And that's what I sought to do in *Unrig*. I interviewed activists all over the country. When I say activists, what I'm talking about is regular people who really don't like the way they're going in the country. And so we had Samantha Partons an 18-year-old college student. We had grandmothers in North Dakota. As I mentioned. We had 10 people in Seattle that got a whole movement started that set an example for the whole country for democracy vouchers and many others. And all these people are just like anyone who is reading this book can see themselves in the story. And I think that kind of story, in all media, is what we need to do to help turn this around.

Ralph Nader: You know in the past programs, we've interviewed a gentleman from Houston who was trying to get people to use local referendums to change things. If the city council doesn't respond, you know, just have the people vote in the law. And there are local referendum opportunities in cities and towns in many parts of our country. And we interviewed someone from Hawaii who wrote a book on how to reclaim our democracy, and he actually proved it in Maui. Maui had an entrenched city council. And something like less than a dozen people organized and got a small majority elected of the city council in Maui. So you're right, I mean, people have got to see it in action, people like them so they can say "I can do that. I'm not that much different from these people who succeeded in X county or X town around the country. I can do that." Do you have any interest in developing a social media system that would highlight these regularly, day after day, from all over the country?

Daniel Newman: Absolutely. I think there's a huge opportunity for that. I do think another component to what makes people motivated is how they see the connection between these rules of our democracy and how it affects their lives. And I want to point out that both police violence and COVID, the two biggest national issues right now and the issues affecting all of us, are really directly [the] result of problems in our democracy. I mean, the lack of government preparedness for COVID is directly driven by what I call in my book the "wealth hoarders". This small group of billionaires includes the Koch brothers among others who has sought to break government over the last 50 years and my book tells that story. And then police violence, one of the factors that allows it to continue to happen, is the lack of accountability for police from district attorneys who are often dependent to get elected by money from police unions.

Ralph Nader: Do you favor universal voting as a duty the way Australia and some other countries have and giving people all the options [i.e.] they can vote for the candidates; they can write in their own candidate, or they can have binding none of the above, saying no to all of them. Do you favor that?

Daniel Newman: I do. Universal voting has a lot of advantages. When people are required to engage then they increase their level of knowledge. And then also, the elected officials have to appeal to the population as a whole instead of as they do now, appealing to just narrow segments and dividing people.

Ralph Nader: And I take that you'd like to get rid of the Electoral College?

Daniel Newman: I would. One of the things that I uncovered in the research for my book was how the U.S. Constitution was really written to insulate lawmakers from the public, to really push the public away. Before the Constitution, a lot of lawmakers had only one-year terms and so they had to face the public regularly. And they also had this "right of instruction", which means the public could tell the lawmaker how they want them to vote and require them to vote a certain way on a certain issue. So the elites, back then at the time the Constitution was created, were really nervous about this. And so they created the Constitution, of course, with six-year terms for senators, four-year terms for president. And so this Constitution, which I grew up learning was sort of a sacred document, implicitly perfect, actually has a lot of problems that prevent government from working the way people want it to. And the Electoral College is part of that.

Ralph Nader: You cover that very brilliantly, graphically, as well as verbally in your book. Near the end of the book you point out what is involved in electing a president historically and you go back to the Founding Fathers. We're talking with Daniel Newman. He's out with his brand new book called *Unrig: How to Fix Our Broken Democracy*. Daniel, there's a lot of commentary on voter suppression, obstructing voters, onerous registration requirements, hacking into software, purging voters, on and on and on. Do you think that the counterattack by people who are trying to preserve the integrity of the voting process in the ease of voting, voting by mail, is going to prevail in November? Or are the Trumpsters going to prevail who are openly trying to reduce the voter turnout?

Daniel Newman: Ralph, I respectfully think that the wrong question is predicting what's going to happen. I think it's a question of what can each of us do to push forward and make sure that the vote is protected to make sure that democracy prevails. And I think that we've seen from just election after election, at the presidential level all the way down, just what a difference small things make. And I think one of the messages of my book is that actually what you do will make a tremendous difference if you do it in alignment with other people and that's what we all need to be focused on now.

Ralph Nader: Before we conclude, can you give our listeners your two websites again for MapLight and the one for this book?

Daniel Newman: At mapLight.org, you can find out where members of Congress get their campaign funds and also help hold social media companies accountable in protecting our democracy and protecting our politics. And then at unrigbook.com, you can find more information about my graphic novel *Unrig*, as well as groups that you can get involved with in fixing our democracy.

Ralph Nader: Well, this book is *Unrig: How to Fix Our Broken Democracy*. You have very impressive endorsers here, very impressive; at the beginning of the book people saying why they like this book. Thank you very much, Daniel Newman. And I wish you well in your virtual book tour in this awful age of COVID-19.

Daniel Newman: Thank you.

Steve Skrovan: We've been speaking with Daniel Newman, author of *Unrig: How to Fix Our Broken Democracy*. We will link to it at ralphnaderradiohour.com. Now let's take a short break. When we return, we are going to return to one of our favorite topics, How to Fix Our Defective Health Care System. 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 3, 2020. I'm Russell Mokhiber. A plan to delay any new Roundup cancer claims for years and shift the key question of whether or not the weed killer causes cancer, from a jury to a hand-picked panel of scientists, faces potential opposition from some of the plaintiffs' attorneys who initiated and led the mass tort claims against Roundup maker Monsanto. That's according to Carey Gillam of U.S. Right to Know. Several members of the lead law firms who won three out of three trials, pitting cancer patients against Monsanto, are considering challenging the terms of a proposed class action settlement negotiated between Monsanto owner Bayer and a small team of lawyers who have not previously been at the forefront of the Roundup litigation, Gillam reported. The class action settlement proposal is an element of a sweeping \$10 billion Roundup litigation settlement Bayer announced June 24th. 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. The United States currently spends the most on healthcare in the world, but has the worst outcomes amongst other similarly industrialized countries. And this pandemic has laid bare the obvious ridiculousness of our employer-based, for-profit healthcare system. It's time to change our hospitals from businesses to something that serves Americans. Our next guest has a new book out about our broken corporatized healthcare system and what we need to do to fix it. David?

David Feldman: Dr. John Geyman is an M.D. and Professor Emeritus of Family Medicine at the University of Washington School of Medicine in Seattle. He's been a family physician in academic medicine for 21 years. For 13 years, he practiced in rural communities. Dr. Geyman has served as President of Physicians for a National Health Program and as a member of the National Academy of Medicine. His new book is titled *Profiteering, Corruption and Fraud in U.S. Health Care*. Welcome back to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*, Dr. John Geyman.

Dr. John Geyman: Thank you. I'm glad to be here.

Ralph Nader: You know the last time, John, that we spoke, the situation was not as vibrant as it is now. You now have over 100 Bernie Sanders' delegates from around the country sending a letter very recently to Nancy Pelosi saying "Pass the single-payer healthcare bill" led by Congresswoman Jayapal from the Seattle area. But more important is something I commented on in one of my weekly columns is that all over the country now, we have frontline workers who are demonstrating great moral and physical courage--healthcare workers, grocery care workers, mass transit workers, sanitation workers. They're on the frontlines; no virtual economy for them. They're exposed to the possibility of getting the COVID-19 virus. They have huge credibility now. With moral and physical courage, they're being praised all over the country. They're being regaled by their employers, who never thought that much to pay them a living wage, in full-page ads such as in the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post* and the *L.A. [Los Angeles] Times*. And so they now have great moral authority on Congress. They have the type of impact that veterans groups have when

they go to Congress and ask for veterans' legislation. So I think [there is] this whole new constituency here that can be organized to get this single-payer bill through that we never had before; it's very hard for senators and representatives to stare these people down, wouldn't you say?

Dr. John Geyman: Absolutely. I think the COVID pandemic has made, in stark relief, how bad [and] inequitable our healthcare system is. And I think the chances of fundamental reform, especially if we have Progressives and Democrats take the Senate back and landsweep elections here in a few months, I think we can pass fundamental healthcare reform. Medicare for All is the only system that will provide universal coverage for everyone at an affordable level for individuals, families and taxpayers. There's just too much fraud and waste in our system that goes to Wall Street and shareholders at [the] expense of patients that we need to correct. So, yeah, I think the momentum should build quick.

Ralph Nader: Well listeners, you should know you're listening to Dr. John Geyman who has written more clear books on what's wrong with the healthcare system in this country, its corporatization, its profiteering, its corruption, its corporate crime, its denial of care, its indifference to human suffering; it's a pay or die system for so many patients especially in the drug industry. And again, there isn't anybody who has written more clear material on this from his own experience as a physician with many patients over the years and as a professor of medicine in the Seattle area. This new book is called *Profiteering, Corruption and Fraud in U.S. Health Care*. And right away, Dr. Geyman gives you an example of what it is like. For example, in 2000, Fresenius, the largest provider of kidney dialysis products and service in the world and with more than 800 dialysis facilities in the U.S., paid a record \$486 million in settlements for thousands of false claims in paying kickbacks to physicians for referral of patients. And then you have another one, Medicare expelled 80 private for-profit mental health centers from the program after an investigation found that 91% of claims were fraudulent. And another one, BASS Orthopedics, [which is] a phantom company--a phantom company, imagine--consisting of just two rented mailboxes and a phone number, sent phony billings to physicians and hundreds of patients collecting 2.1 million dollars without providing any services until its bank account was frozen by a federal judge! And this is all by way of saying that if there were more prosecutorial resources, these crimes would be caught and the criminals would be prosecuted and convicted. But we have very few prosecutors, very few investigators in the federal government and state governments to deal with this. That's why, according to Professor Malcolm Sparrow of Harvard, a billion dollars a day, seven days a week at a minimum, is stolen from the American people and insurance companies through computerized billing fraud and abuse. But Dr. Geyman doesn't stop there. I think people don't understand the extent to which the medical profession has been taken over by corporations. And can you give some information on that--how what started out as largely non-profit hospitals, now almost all the ancillary institutions from dialysis centers to nursing homes, to hospice, to mental health, are owned by corporations.

Dr. John Geyman: Yes. Well, very true. Most people don't realize that two-thirds of all the nursing homes in the country are for-profit and they are big chains, largely investor owned, and the same with home care. Seventy-five percent of home care around the country is for-profit; the same with dialysis centers. You mentioned Fresenius, that is 90%. Surgcenter is 95%. Freestanding laboratory and imaging places, that's 100%. Yeah, and the growth of investor-owned care is just huge, whether at hospitals, or emergency medical services, or even HMOs or mental health centers and on and on. And just to look at nursing homes, what they do is they come in and open a private

equity ownership where they plan to only be there five years or so. But they come in and they cut nursing levels and staff; care gets worse and worse. They have more falls and higher death rates. Then they leave with very little notice. We had such a nursing home here on our San Juan Island that was here twelve years or so then left the same way with three weeks' notice to patients. And so yeah, especially the private equity part, but investor ownership is all for investors and profits and not for patient care and they're actually a danger to our system.

Ralph Nader: One thing I like about your new book, John, is it has interspersed how this affects real patients with their own healthcare nightmares in terms of gouging mistreatment and delays. And so you're always brought down, from the statistics and the graphs, however clear they are, to the human interest aspects of it. You mention on page 118, well, he is a little bit of a celebrity, but anyway, that's why people listen to his *Time Magazine* cover story. Steve Brill is a well-known legal journalist and lawyer. He had emergency surgery for an aortic aneurysm in 2014 [with] insurance under Aetna. And his bill for eight days in the hospital came to a \$197,000. And he couldn't get explanations of his many bills even after showing them to Aetna's CEO, which motivated him to write the book in 2015, *America's Bitter Pill: Money, Politics, Backroom Deals, and the Fight to Fix Our Broken Healthcare System*. One thing, you have a chapter that says "Can these Adverse Impacts Be Reversed" If so, how?

Dr. John Geyman: Well, they certainly can. We have three main alternatives before us now--to continue the status quo, which is terrible. The first would be building on the Affordable Care Act. Well, all this has continued with no cost containment and no containment of fraud and profiteering over the 10 years we've had the Affordable Care Act, so that's not an answer. Then some are saying, well, Medicare for some, let's bring forward some kind of a public option. There are different variants; you could lower the age for Medicare eligibility; you could do a couple other things. But that would leave the private insurance industry in place and still no cost containment and build much more bureaucracy and waste. So the only real fix is single-payer Medicare for All and that would provide cost containment. We would negotiate prices of prescription drugs like the VA does, has for years and gets prices down to 58% of the usual. So we would do global budgeting for hospitals and other facilities, nursing homes and all. We would have a transition away from private ownership to public interest. So it can all be done [with] Jayapal's bill in the House. H.R.1384, the Medicare for All single-payer bill, has wide support, as Ralph is saying, and can do it all.

Ralph Nader: You know, you live right near Canada and the Canadian . . .

Dr. John Geyman: Eight miles, yeah.

Ralph Nader: As the crow flies. And Canada has a single-payer system. They come in half the price per capita and they cover everybody. We don't cover . . . 80 million people are underinsured or they don't have insurance at all. I think it's now 32 million people don't have insurance at all.

Dr. John Geyman: And 87 million are underinsured and insurance rates go up every year much higher than the cost of living, so it gets worse every year.

Ralph Nader: Now tell us about the Canadian system and why don't we learn more; why don't we have it more publicized in the U.S.?

Dr. John Geyman: It's a much better system and has good access to care. They spend less on their healthcare system than us and they get a lot more. Yes, you can wait if you have an elective

hip replacement or such as that you can wait for several months. But you can wait forever and never get care in this country. They did a study a few years ago, which is still the same kind of answer, orthopedic surgeons down in Southern California and, you know, here's a teenage kid with a broken arm, he's on Medicaid, would you take care of him? No. Virtually, none of the orthopedists would even see him. So we ration care by ability to pay every day. In Canada they don't. They have a better system.

Ralph Nader: And no one dies in Canada because they can't afford health insurance to get diagnosed and treated in time. But in the U.S., it's between 60 and 100 and ten thousand people, according to a recent study, who die every year because they can't afford health insurance to get diagnosed and treated in time. I was impressed by one of your graphs here, which showed the growth of administrators compared to the number of physicians. Can you explain that?

Dr. John Geyman: Oh, yes. As we develop the profiteering side on the private maximization of income side of health care, it's all about billing. And it takes lots of billing clerks for each position to maximize those bills to the patient. And so, yes, the growth of administrators is the sky high versus the minimal growth of physicians. But it's all about billing. And we get ripped off all the time by the private insurance industry, [which is] very wasteful. Their goal [is] to maximize their revenue and for shareholders. So that'll all go away with Medicare for All. As a matter of interest, I was in practice and in Mt. Shasta, California back in the '60s. When Medicare and Medicaid were passed; it was not disruptive; it was seamless. The patient would come in with their Medicare card and I'd be able to say "How can I help you?" Now the question is "What's your insurance?" That's always the first question.

Ralph Nader: And you have a chapter called "Can These Adverse Impacts Be Reversed?" What is your hope for the future and do you think this COVID-19 response and the heroics of these millions of frontline workers can be organized to really get this through Congress? Because things can happen very fast even though we've been waiting since Harry Truman proposed Universal Health Insurance; things can happen very fast.

Dr. John Geyman: I agree, and I hope so, and I think that will happen. The pressure from the public is going to be huge and the COVID makes it all obvious. And the cost of that care for a totally disorganized and very poor response is going to be much larger, I think, than most people realize yet. Dr. Fauci does for sure. But this is big and bad and our response is just about the worst in the world. The graph that shows the cases in this country versus, say, Europe now is just mindboggling. And we're way behind the curve in terms of a national response. The Trump Administration has been missing in action and we're way behind on testing and tracing.

Ralph Nader: Yeah, the profiteering, so-called healthcare system is coming home to roost. All the ugliest aspects of them are erupting during this unprepared, defenseless response by the federal government under the bungling Trump to the COVID-19 endemic, yes. This book by Dr. John Geyman, *Profiteering, Corruption and Fraud in U.S. Health Care*, is the exact book you should put in the hands of your members of Congress. It's an overwhelming, detailed, clear-cut, well-documented series of arguments on why we have to get rid of this profiteering system with a single-payer, full Medicare for All, everybody in, nobody out, free choice of doctor and hospital with far better outcomes and lifesaving effects. I have an idea. If any of our listeners in congressional districts or in the states want to send a copy of this book to their senator in their name, can they email you, tell you their name and address and their member of Congress? And will you send the member of Congress, in their name, one of these books?

Dr. John Geyman: Absolutely.

Ralph Nader: And how can they get in touch with you? Because when it comes from a constituent or a group of constituents--teachers, lawyers, doctors, mechanics, civic organizers, they're going to pay attention on Capitol Hill. So how do they reach you to put in that request?

Dr. John Geyman: By email, [jgeyman](mailto:jgeyman@uw.edu), that's J-G-E-Y-M-A-N, @uw.edu. That stands for University of Washington, so jgeyman@uw.edu. I'd be glad to, Ralph. And by the way also, I'm just finishing now my fourth commonsense pamphlet along the idea of Thomas Paine back in 1775 and '76. But this one is *Medicare for All: Foundation of a New Normal in U.S. Health Care*. It's just a 40-page little pamphlet but I'm going to send this, Ralph, to every member of Congress, all 535, in the next week or two, so that's going forward.

Ralph Nader: That's excellent. Now don't disappoint us, listeners; this is a terrific opportunity. All you have to do is email Dr. John Geyman. He just gave you the email and he's going to give it to you again in a few seconds. And just say, send my congressperson XYZ, send my senator ABC, in my name--and here's how my senator or member of the House can contact me--this book *Profiteering, Corruption and Fraud in U.S. Health Care*. That's the way you get the message to them. And by the way, order a copy for yourself as well. Don't disappoint us, listeners; we keep bragging about how active you all are, how engaged you all are, how involved you all are. And this is a great, unique way to send a message to your two senators and representative.

Steve Skrovan: We have been speaking with Dr. John Geyman, author of *Profiteering, Corruption and Fraud in U.S. Health Care*. We will link to his book at ralphnaderradiohour.com. Well that's our show. I want to thank our guests again, Daniel Newman and John Geyman. For those of you listening on the radio, we're going to wrap it up here. But for you podcast listeners, stay tuned for some bonus material we wrap up in a thing called "The Wrap Up". A transcript to the show will appear on the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour* website soon after the episode is posted.

David Feldman: Join us next week on the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour* when we welcome the Republican wordsmith, Frank Luntz, who has coined the terms "clean coal" and other right-wing talking points like "death tax" and "climate change". Thank you, Ralph.

Ralph Nader: Thank you, everybody. Take advantage of this, listeners, send a free copy of Dr. Geyman's book to your members of Congress.

[Music]

You say you're tired of trying
You say you have no choice
You say you're just one person
And who will hear your voice

Don't let 'em . . .