

Ralph Nader Radio Hour Episode 91

David Feldman, Steve Skrovan, Ralph Nader, Russell Mokhiber

From the KPFK Studios in Southern California it's the Ralph Nader Radio Hour.

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

David Feldman: Hello there everybody.

Steve Skrovan: And the man of the hour Ralph Nader. How are you today Ralph?

Ralph Nader: We're rolling, let's go fellows.

Steve Skrovan: Mr. Smalltalk, that's what I always call him - Mr. Smalltalk. Well, this week's radio hour will be completely devoted to your listener questions. Our shows have been so full in recent weeks it has been harder to get to them. But this week we're going to do nothing but... nothing but your listener questions. At some point we will check in, as we usually do, with our corporate crime reporter, Russell Mokhiber. But before we get to that, David you have an announcement to make.

David Feldman: We would like to welcome a new affiliate, WPKN 89.5 FM in Bridgeport, Connecticut. We'll be on every Monday at 6 PM on that fine community radio station, welcome Bridgeport. And we would like to give a shout-out to our friend, Scott Harris from the show, "Between The Lines," which originates from WPKN; and Ralph has been a guest on that show many times. Scott has been a big supporter of the Ralph Nader Radio Hour. And also thanks to program director, Valerie Richardson, who made it all happen. So Steve, we've got to get to our questions because Bridgeport is waiting.

Steve Skrovan: Very good, thanks David. This first question is particularly relevant, Ralph, in light of the recent shooting in San Bernardino, California. And I want to frame it a certain way. But the question is from a listener named Thomas Anderson. And he simply says, "What should be done about ISIS?" Now here's how I'd like to deal with the question. President Obama addressed the nation in prime time last week and outlined a strategy. And I want to go through some of the points he made and have you respond to that. He thought the strategy should be, number one: more airstrikes on facilities, oil facilities and other military action to what he said, "Take out ISIL leaders in any country." I assumed that means drones. The second prong is to deploy Special Forces to help train and equip Iraqi and Syrian

forces. The third prong is sharing intelligence with other countries. The fourth thing he said was to establish a process and a timeline to end the war in Syria, I assume that's the diplomatic efforts in that area. And then the fifth was reviewing the visa waiver process by which Syed Farook's wife got into the country. So, that's the first part of that Ralph. What would you say to all that?

Ralph Nader: Well what I said when I was running for president, why should I answer a mess that I foresee and showed how to forestall, namely avoiding supporting dictators in the Middle East to oppress their own people. Carving up the area back a hundred years ago by the British and the French after World War I. Presently and in the past over decade, invading, attacking, assassinating, droning, special forcing any place in the Middle East we want to go. And all that's done is increase the opposition. It has increased the number of fighters. It has increased the recruitment by ISIS over the world, not just the Islamic world are coming in from Europe as well. It increased the number of fighting groups and attacking groups in 20 countries now. It started in northeast Afghanistan after 9/11. So we've metastasized this whole operation. So why do we think more of it is going to lead to anything but more opposition, more hatred of the invader. You see what Mr. Obama and others don't understand is that no strategy that doesn't repel the invader by our adversaries is ever going to work. And it wouldn't work with us. If we were invaded and occupied, it didn't matter what that was done to us. As long as we wanted to get rid of the invader, there would be more and more fighters from all backgrounds recruited to save the USA. Number two is, there needs to be a really rigorous peace conference of all the players, which is now in Vienna and that means the US, Russia, France, England, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Iraq, Iran, all the people, all the groups, all the countries that are involved in fueling one faction against another in Iraq and Syria and elsewhere. Because unless they can come to an agreement - and none of them are going to win - the best time to use diplomacy is when you can argue to everyone else, you're not going to win, nobody's going to win. This is going to go on and on and on and become more anarchic, more endemic, more brutal. That's the second approach is muscular diplomacy. And then the third are the people in the areas that are dominated by ISIS and dominated by other dictators. We have to become a humanitarian power, we're now seen by these people as a drone power, as a military power that is perfectly willing to kill a hundred civilians in order to destroy three suspects. And that is never going to succeed and it's a violation of international law, a violation of our federal statutes as well as the constitution. Because these wars have never been declared by Congress. So we need to recognize that for every billion dollars we spend in weaponry, we can spend 10% of that and get more out of it by humanitarian assistance of a whole variety, institutional: showing how agrarian expansion can occur in terms of feeding people, as well as healthcare, as well as drinking water, as well as supporting what most people would call survival, fundamentals that tend to bring all kinds of people together, because they all want to survive with their families.

Steve Skrovan: Right, so you would call a major peace conference, and you believe that all the players could come together and sit around one table?

Ralph Nader: Yeah, because they're all now jockeying for a little advantage here, a little victory there, but when you put them all around the table - and you know we do have a lot of leverage with a lot of

these countries - you put 'em all around the table with Russia and Iran and Turkey as well as the other countries. You best say, "Look you want to continue this that's draining your budgets? It's going to backfire in your own country. You're going to start getting attacks and bombings in your own country. Let's try to settle this." There's an isolation factor that can undermine ISIS, because I know they extort a lot of money locally to keep themselves going, but they also get a lot of weaponry and money from outside. By the way, no one ever raised this question. You the US taxpayer spent billions of dollars training and equipping the Iraqi Army that is 400,000 strong with modern equipment. ISIS has about 15,000 fighters in Iraq. Many of them have never fought before. And the only modern equipment they have is the US equipment they've stolen or seized from the Iraqi Army when the Iraqi Army was running away from them. So, why don't we focus on that? There are people who would say "Look, this is a civil war in Iraq; and the Iraqi Army should be able to defend the boundaries of Iraq and the country that they're supposed to be taking care of in terms of security and stability." By the way, the Kurds also have to be represented at the Vienna conference. But you see, you hardly heard that did you in President Obama's speech or any of the right wing war mongering yahoos on the Republican side whose ignorance is only exceeded by their cowardliness. They've never been in the Armed Forces. Their children have never been in the Armed Forces, except for Lindsey Graham who's kind of a colonel in the reserves. And he wants to send US troops over there. I guess most people don't like it even in the Republican Party, because in the polls he's about 1% or less.

Steve Skrovan: Right, do you think this is really in light of all that politically viable for somebody in Obama's position? Or does the right wing noise machine sort of forced him to talk tough? Because the first thing he talked about airstrikes and drone strikes in other countries.

Ralph Nader: Yeah, well the first thing a politician in US should ask is what does ISIS want us to do? Well they want us to put ground troops. They want us to bomb more in ways that kills civilians. They want us to continue to support corrupt regimes, which they are rallying support to oppose. Why are we playing in their hands? They want us to restrict immigration. They want us to curtail our civil liberties and engage in discrimination against Muslims, Muslim-American, Arab-Americans. They want us to do most of what we're doing. So, if I was a strategic thinker in the US government, I would say, "Why is it that Richard Clarke - who is the chief anti-terrorism adviser to George W. Bush - why when he left the White House he wrote a book, and he basically said, 'Osama Bin Laden in some mountainous redoubt in Afghanistan must be saying to George W. Bush, please invade Iraq, please invade Iraq.'" Now this is a conservative man, Richard Clarke. He knows that we're playing into their hands; and they must be totally delighted, because we're doing the work for them.

Steve Skrovan: Right. Now in light of this terrorist act, Obama said some things on the domestic front too, and he called upon Congress to take several steps. One was, make sure there's no one on the no-fly list is able to buy a gun. And number two is make it harder for people to buy assault weapons. What's your take on that?

Ralph Nader: Well, he's targeting the gun control issues very narrowly in the context of the recent eruption and violence in San Bernardino and elsewhere, mass killings. The approach to gun control is very simple. Canadians look like us. They're pretty virile people. They like hunting. But they have a system where they have to register their guns, and they have to have a license. So, if you have to have a license to drive a car - as the old saying goes - and you have to register a car, you should register your firearms. Obviously, military weapons should not be part of that equation. Obviously, people can continue to hunt. They can continue to bear arms, but obviously we would do something about 100 Americans a day - listen to this - a day that are killed by guns in the US. You had in a fraction of the day when San Bernardino blew up, in the fraction of a day, more people were killed by guns in the US. And it goes on day after day. So, a hundred a day means about 36,000 a year, which is more than Americans killed on the highways, including pedestrians. So, he did not have a broad base gun control proposal. It's very, very much tailored to the circumstances of San Bernardino.

David Feldman: What if Washington came to its senses? And what would it look like getting rid of these guns? I mean how do you stop the proliferation of guns in this country? Haven't we just crossed the Rubicon? Isn't it impossible to turn back now?

Ralph Nader: Well, some jurisdictions have a gun sale policy. Bring in your guns. We'll pay you so much. And it seemed to work. It reduces the number of guns. Second of all, the background checks are supported by a great majority of the American people, including a majority of the NRA. There are gun control measures that are supported by a majority in the NRA, but the most militant minority in these organizations carries the day. The other thing is this: It is, David, going to take a while to overcome this Wild West heritage of ours, obviously. The NRA after these mass shootings always seems to advance their agenda like, "Oh I think people should be able to carry guns into schools. That would have stopped Sandy Hook in Connecticut. Or people should carry guns to Universities or to churches. That would have stopped the shooting in Charleston." But you know what? I was told that there's one place where guns are not permitted. You know what that place is? The NRA headquarters in Virginia.

David Feldman: Wow.

Steve Skrovan: Really? So, you cannot walk in with a gun to the NRA headquarters?

Ralph Nader: That's right. That's what I was told.

David Feldman: Wow. Is the Supreme Court maybe moving towards our side on this?

Ralph Nader: Well, they've got a couple cases coming up. So far, they have broadened the definition of the Second Amendment. They've cut back on certain District of Columbia controls. So, we will see. It's often said the Supreme Court justices have their finger to the wind. So, let's see how they see the wind blowing.

Steve Skrovan: And also in light of all this you've got Donald Trump talking about banning all Muslims from the country for a time and invoking FDR's Japanese Internment Policy as a positive thing.

Ralph Nader: What I think we should do is also ban all candidates for political office, who are considered by an impartial panel to be clinically insane.

(Laughter)

Ralph Nader: Half in jest. Basically, you've got a problem here in the US that nobody's talking about. I just wrote a column saying, "The one question that nobody in the press will ever ask a candidate running for office, and the question is: since the Constitution starts with, We the People, not We the Corporations, how do you, candidate, specifically propose to shift power to us, the people, in our role as tax payers, voters, consumers, workers, et cetera from the few to the many. From the 1% to the 99%, from Wall Street to Main Street, come on. How do you do it? No more flattery, no more flummoxing, no more fooling. We want to know, because we're powerless. We're powerless in terms of how our taxes are spent, wasted, corrupted. We're powerless as voters, because we've allowed a few to pour money and buy and rent politicians in elections. We're powerless as consumers because the credit scores and the fine print contracts are subjugating our freedom of contract and bargaining power to mention a few consumer oppressions. And we're powerless as workers, because we have anti union laws like the Taft-Hartley Act of 1947, which the Democratic party and the unions never raise in elections especially when they endorse Hillary Clinton - to repeal that, make it more difficult for workers and giant companies to form unions like Walmart and Target and a lot of the other industrial corporations." What we're talking about is the following: if people do not do their homework, they don't spend a few hours studying the records and the positions, and the behavior of the candidates, who are asking them to vote for president or for senator or for governor, they will get the Ted Cruz's. They will get the Donald Trumps. They will get totally deranged people, who can't answer factual questions because they don't believe in facts. They don't believe in science. They don't believe in truth. Aldous Huxley, the great science philosopher from Britain once said, "Facts do not cease to exist because they are ignored." It comes down, people, to do your homework. Because all those people are yahooing in favor of Donald Trump, I guarantee you they haven't spent two hours studying his bankruptcies, studying how he hires undocumented workers, studying how he's dealt with corrupt elements in the construction industry, studying he's been bailed out by you, the tax payer, in terms of a variety of corporate welfare disbursements in his construction projects. And by the way, when is he going to release his tax returns? Donald Trump, when are you going to release your tax returns? You're going to wait as long as Mitt Romney waited, month after month? When are you going to release your tax returns, fully and comprehensively? What do you say David and Steve? Are you doing your homework on these candidates? Can you write a thousand word essay on Ted Cruz or Marco Rubio, Fidel Castro's revenge on America?

- (Laughter)

David Feldman: Actually, wasn't Rubio Batista's revenge? They left before Castro.

Ralph Nader: Yes, but he would have returned. He probably would have returned if Castro didn't take over.

Steve Skrovan: Ralph you're a student of history. Have you ever seen or read at least within the last 150 years such right wing xenophobic fascism get so much play? I know it's bubbled up here and there. And it's certainly obviously in Europe in the 30s... 20s, 30s and 40s it held sway. But, have you ever seen that kind of thing in this country as much as what Donald Trump is appealing to in his popularity?

Ralph Nader: Well, certainly not as widely disseminated. I mean there have been people like Donald Trump in the 19th Century and early 20th Century, very crazed and bigoted. The one way for a minority or women to be praised by Donald Trump is after he bigotedly or sexistly attacks them. And then he says he loves them. You notice that? Look what he said about Hispanics, a wall, they come over, his notorious comments.

Steve Skrovan: They're rapists.

Ralph Nader: Right, right. And then what does he say? "I love Hispanics! I hire Hispanics! I work with Hispanics! So, every time he attacks a group, he turns around says he loves them. This is not a stable personality. I think he's trying to improve his brand through notoriety and go back on NBC, maybe to even greater millions. But, there's something - you know how Donald Trump keep saying, "There's something going on around the country. There's something going on in Obama's head. There's something we have to learn more about?" All of those questions apply to Donald Trump.

David Feldman: How frightened are you? Because I've heard you say on this show we're one big terrorist attack away from some serious threat to our democracy. Is 2016 shaping up to be 1968?

Ralph Nader: Well, you know we have military defenses against everything. We have enough firepower in our nuclear warheads to blow up the world several times over with nuclear weapons, nuclear submarines, nuclear bombers, nuclear missiles. The one thing we don't have a good defense of is our democracy. So, if we have another one or two 9/11 scale attacks, forget about our civil liberties, forget about our constitution, forget about habeas corpus, due process of law. This is not a jeremiad. It's a

statement based on what happened after 9/11 in terms of the Patriot Act, searching your home and not telling you for 72 hours, searching all your medical, personal information, your financial information, being able to arrest you without charges, throw you in jail, subject every American to mass electronic surveillance by the NSA. By the way, there's no gray area here. If you have a government that electronically snoops on you as the NSA can with these gigantic computers, and they don't get a judicial warrant, they are violating the FISA Act, which basically provides for a first class felony conviction: five years in jail. We have felonious people in government who have done this again and again, complete impunity and immunity. See how weak our defenses are? The right of privacy is constitutionally based ever since Brandeis wrote his famous law review article with Warren in the Harvard Law Review back in the 1890s. That's what started ensconcing the right of privacy. What is the right of privacy? It's the right not to be searched and seized, material in your home without a judicial warrant. It's the right not to be wiretapped. It's pretty fundamental, isn't it people? So, we have very weak defenses of our democracy, and if you ask senators and presidents, "What is our budget for defending our democracy?" They would respond entirely in military terms and police terms, right?

David Feldman: President Obama backed away from the militarization of our police departments, who were giving a lot of Pentagon supplies, tanks, flamethrowers to our local police. When the guys started shooting up the Planned Parenthood Clinic, the local police had to break in with an actual tank. Do you think it's wrong to militarize the police? I'm not so sure it's a bad idea in light of all these guns and what they found in San Bernardino on that married couple, the ammunition they have. Why shouldn't we militarize the police at this point?

Ralph Nader: Because it brings in military weapons that are inappropriate to use for police actions. Anything that the attackers in these mass killings have used involves weapons that the police have plenty of. But once you start with tanks and bazookas and artillery, I don't have to tell you David, there's certain consequences to the way this country lives under that kind of militarization. Because, the next thing you're going to see is subordination of civilian control of the military. The next thing you're going to see is, "Oh why don't we have militarized drones and knock off these people from the air with collateral damage," you see, the same way we've treated these people overseas. So it's a hard chariot to control once it's underway. There's plenty of weaponry now in police departments to handle whatever threat there is.

Steve Skrovan: Well we're off to a good start, gentlemen. David, why don't you take the next question, it's off a completely different topic, domestic topic, certainly Ralph's wheelhouse. David take that one.

David Feldman: April McLean writes, "When do you think the medical injury compensation reform will be overturned in California? I have followed your plea to Governor Brown. Are you still active in this fight against MICRA in California? Patients continue to die. Loved ones continue to suffer. I know that my son is alive only by a miracle. I do know that two other children prior to my son's care should not have died but did because of medical malpractice. I'm actively fighting to change this. But with MICRA

it is nearly impossible to get justice. Please advise if you are still fighting this fight. I beg you Mr. Nader.” Why don’t first explain what the Medical Injury Compensation Reform Act is please?

Ralph Nader: Yes. Well, we are fighting to repeal MICRA, April McLean. Thank you for your question. MICRA is a very simple restriction on people’s right to go to court when they have been subjected to medical and hospital malpractice, which by the way, according to the Harvard School of Public Health, takes 2,000 lives a week – 2000 lives a week - in hospitals and clinics around the country. MICRA in effect says, no matter how grievously injured you have been by an incompetent doctor, a doctor shouldn’t be allowed to be licensed, is incapacitated, he’s addicted, she’s not up to date and she made a bad mistake for which she’s insured. It says no matter how grievous your suffering is you can’t collect more than \$250,000 for a lifetime of pain and suffering. That’s pain and suffering compensation. Thank you, Governor Jerry Brown 1975 who signed it into law. He then became governor again a few years ago. And in the meantime, he put out a statement denouncing his own law, saying it was cruel, it hasn’t worked out well, and it needs to be changed. That statement is in the hands of reporters all over California and legislators all over California. He has not disavowed that statement in the early 1990s. So, he becomes governor and he gets two thirds of the legislature in Sacramento belonged to his Democratic party. He’s got an easy way to get rid of MICRA. What does he do? Nothing. He won’t speak out against it. He will not tell the heads of the California Assembly and State Senate to get it through, which they could in 10 minutes. Nothing. Therefore, everyday in California there are children, elderly, home makers, who don’t have much wage loss, because they don’t have a job. All they have is pain and suffering compensation who are denied in court. It’s even crueler than that, David and Steve. The jury is not told about this \$250,000 cap. So, a little boy got a \$7 million verdict. He’s completely disabled due to a medical malpractice event. And the jury walked out figuring they did their job. The door closed, and the judge had to tell the parents, “I am bound by MICRA to reduce that \$7 million to \$250,000.” And they have to take care of this little boy as long as they’re alive. What are they going to do? See what I mean? So here is what I suggest you do, April McLean. You not only get 10, 15, 20 signatures on a letter to Governor Jerry Brown, but you actually ask for a meeting. And you say that the meeting can be at his convenience, whether in Oakland where he lives, or in Sacramento where he works and that if he wants a hundred signatures, a thousand signatures, you’d be happy to oblige. But you want a face-to-face meeting. And then cite all that I just related. Send them a copy of this letter. And I think the letter is everywhere now online. But key thing is not just to beg him to do that right thing. Tell him you want a meeting and you want a meeting that’s going to include parents of children, who have been run into the ground by this vicious, physician organization supported MICRA.

David Feldman: Is that why Governor Brown isn’t doing it, because nobody’s making him do it? Or is there another reason?

Ralph Nader: He’s afraid of the doctors. He told me the lawyers in California are weak compared to the doctors, who are organized to the teeth. Why don’t I do an initiative? I said. “Well, would you support an initiative?” No comment. So, the trial lawyers and the consumer groups did an initiative, but they mixed it up with a provision requiring urine drug test for doctors. So the doctors got together \$50

million, plastered the television airways with ads, and defeated it. It's not up to an initiative. It's up to Governor Jerry Brown and the two Democrats, who control two thirds of the vote in the legislature.

Steve Skrovan: Well, we're at about the half way mark here, so we're going to take a short break and check in with the corporate crime reporter Russell Mokhiber, Russell?

Russell Mokhiber: From the National Press Building in Washington D.C. this is your corporate crime reporter morning minute for Friday, December 4th 2015, I'm Russell Mokhiber. A jury in Charleston, West Virginia has found former Massey Energy CEO Don Blankenship guilty of conspiracy to violate the nation's mine safety laws in connection with the 2010 explosion at Massey's Upper Big Branch mine that killed 29 miners. The jury cleared Blankenship on two counts of lying to the federal government. In his closing remarks, US Attorney Booth Goodwin called Blankenship an outlaw and said he operated a lawless empire. Blankenship's defense lawyer said the case should never have been filed and that they will appeal the conviction. University of Maryland Law Professor, Rena Steinzor, author of Why Not Jail, said that Blankenship made an already hazardous workplace into a horror show that made men fear for their lives every time they journey thousands of feet underground. For the corporate crime reporter, I'm Russell Mokhiber.

Steve Skrovan: All right, thank you Russell. Ralph, I want to ask you a question. Everytime I go through these questions on Facebook there are, every once in a while crop up these questions about 2000 and people accusing you of electing George W. Bush and blaming you for the Iraq War and all of this kind of stuff. And I know personally I've had this debate hundreds of times. I imagine you've had it thousands of times. I want to address this, but I don't want to get into the usual argument about the logistics and the numbers and the philosophy behind it. I want to talk to you about the backlash and ask you how or if it has affected your work and how people respond to you moving forward.

Ralph Nader: It has affected our work. Because, if you're in that trap of thinking that only two candidates control and own all the votes in America, Republican and Democratic presidential candidates, then you become unwittingly perhaps a political bigot against any candidate that challenged the two party dictatorship, even with an agenda that many liberals supported in the Democratic party. So after 2000 election, Senator Joe Biden, who kept me from testifying against Robert Bork when he was chair of the Senate Judiciary Committee, went on TV and said that I better not come up on Capitol Hill. Imagine that. I better not come up and talk to my representatives. See what political bigotry leads an otherwise sensible person to say. I thought he was sort of foolish saying it, and I dismissed it, until I realized that I was being kept from testifying in the House and Senate again and again, year in and year out. I think I've only testified four times since year 2000 instead of 40 times. People would not give contributions to groups that I started, which have been independent for years, like Public Citizen. People started not inviting me to give lectures. I used to get honorary degrees by the baleful from colleges, universities. I haven't gotten an honorary degree since the year 2000. I'm not saying this has deterred me in any way. It just has provided data to show how corrosive and what a dead-end this

“least worst” voting attitude is between the two party duopoly. Because, how are they ever going to change things if the two parties are dialing for the same corporate dollars and are becoming more and more alike in their foreign and military policy and in their approach to Wall Street with some outstanding exceptions like Bernie Sanders or Elizabeth Warren, two senators? How are they going to change anything, if you don’t have a competitive democracy? If you can’t say that you can deny your least worst major party candidate your vote and give it to a third party candidate, how are you going to have any leverage whatsoever? What’s your breaking point? What’s your moral compass? You don’t have any, when you go for the least worst of the two parties, because they’ll always be a least worse. And when millions of voters vote for least worst, instead of who they really believe in, every four years both parties get worse. The Republicans become more extreme. The Democrats become more corporatist.

David Feldman: You know there are only two arguments I can win. One is vegetarianism and Ralph Nader causing the war in Iraq and it’s a very simple, I always say Tom Daschle was the Democratic Senate Majority Leader when the war authorization got voted in. He should have stopped the war.

Ralph Nader: Exactly. The Democrats could have stopped the war in Iraq. They could have stopped the tax cuts for corporations and the rich that Bush put to Congress. If you don’t believe it, ask how many times the Republicans are stopping Obama in Congress. They’re not so squeamish, but the Democrats often don’t know who they are. And when someone like Scott Allen with the question that he asks, would Gore have sent service members to invade Iraq? Well, nobody knows, number one. Nobody knows what he would have done after 9/11. But we do know two things: that he and Clinton pushed through a resolution in 1998 in Congress declaring that it’s national policy to topple Saddam Hussein in Iraq. And number two: Clinton and Gore were bombing Iraq, because of a no fly zone regularly. And in one case blew up an apartment building that killed 27 civilians including Iraq’s leading female artist, because Clinton thought there was a suspect in the building. So, I’m not so sure that Al Gore and Joe Lieberman, the hawkish vice president aspirant would not have invaded Iraq.

Steve Skrovan: Well, I tell people Ralph that with Joe Lieberman as vice president and playing the role of Dick Cheney, we probably wouldn’t have invaded Iraq, we probably would have invaded Iran.

Ralph Nader: Yes. He was extremely hawkish about Iran. And I might add this in response to Scott Allen. He said that I handed George Bush the election. That’s interesting. I guess that means that I got more votes from Al Gore than George Bush did, see? Or that I had no right and no other American had any right to run on a progressive party candidate, the Green Party to express my First Amendment rights to free speech, petition and assembly, which is what you do when you run for elective office. And so where does that leave Scott Allen? Does that leave him as a political bigot? As an anti civil libertarian? What is his breaking point when he would no longer support a Democratic candidate for president, because of what that Democratic candidate has done and stood for? What is his breaking point? Has he ever even thought about these, or is he also blaming me for sun spots on the moon? Is he blaming me

for the Electoral College it took the campaign victory away from Al Gore, who won the popular vote by 500,000 votes? Is he blaming me for Jeb Bush and Katherine Harris, the Florida Secretary of State's corruption and shenanigans in Florida? Is he blaming me for Al Gore not getting his home state of Tennessee, which is almost unheard of in presidential campaigns? Is he blaming me for the five/four political decision of the Supreme Court, the five Republicans who stopped the Florida Supreme Court from continuing its order for a statewide voter recount following the election? You see how foolish people look when you spell out the consequences for freedom, for choice, for civil liberties, for a competitive democracy, for giving voters more choice by giving them more candidates? When you spell out the consequences, I think even Scott Allen would start having thoughts in private about what he's asserting.

Steve Skrovan: Well isn't it true Ralph that really the only mainstream Democrat who didn't blame you was Al Gore?

Ralph Nader: That's correct. Al Gore knows exactly why he lost. It was stolen from him in Florida, which was made possible by the electoral college which I hope will be repealed soon by interstate compact led by Steve Silberstein, a philanthropist in San Francisco. And by the political, purely political 5/4 decision, five Republicans voted against four Democrats on a Supreme Court to take the election away from the Florida recount process.

Steve Skrovan: I have my own theory about Al Gore, and it's based on absolutely nothing but my own literary imagination, so if I'm writing this as a fiction, piece of fiction, Al Gore is a guy who was raised in a hotel in Washington D.C. His father was a senator, and he's being groomed for leadership, to the point where he's running for president in 1988 at the age of 39. And then does become vice president under Clinton. I don't think he really wanted this, the way he didn't really fight during the recount, the way his concession speech is sort of famous for its lack of fight. And since then, he's become an Oscar winner. This is the best thing that ever happened to him on a personal level. He's won an Oscar. He's the hope that never was. He never had to be in the crucible of being president, so people will -- he's that hope that represents what people thought would be --

David Feldman: I disagree. I think he wanted it.

Steve Skrovan: But this is my story that I'm writing, David.

David Feldman: I know.

Steve Skrovan: You think he wanted it?

David Feldman: Yeah. And I also - Ralph isn't it true that the Miami Herald and a consortium of reporters counted all the ballots in Florida and by every standard Al Gore won, by any measure of counting those ballots? But it was after 9/11, so that story got under reported. That had the recount taken place statewide Al Gore would have won by any measure of those hanging chads.

Ralph Nader: Well, that was the assertion. But you never would have known except by this thorough Florida Supreme Court ordered recount. And that would have been the most accurate. But the important thing is that the Democrats lost that election because of the Electoral College. Had they - didn't have the Electoral College they would have won, because he won the popular vote, Al Gore, by 500,000. And they never went after the Electoral College after that. It's arguable that they lost the 2004 election in Ohio that they might have won. If they won Ohio, Kerry would have been president. In other words, the Electoral College is always there; and it's the only antiquated law in the Western World, where you can come in second in the popular vote and win the election. I mean is there anything more absurd than that? So, that's why I like Steve Silberstein. He now has enough states to account for 165 electoral votes. If he gets the 270, and he's got - California passed the law, Maryland passed the law and New York State passed the law. If he gets to 270 before 2020, then the states who passed those laws will eliminate the Electoral College, because those laws basically say something simple: that they will throw their electoral votes to whoever wins the nationwide popular vote. So, they can get rid of the Electoral College without a Constitutional Amendment.

Steve Skrovan: And for those of you interested in more information about that, we did a show with Steve Silberstein a few months back. So go to the archives at ralphnaderradiohour.com and get more details on that. So David, let's spin the big wheel and ask another question.

David Feldman: Okay, this comes to us from Glenn Miller. "Hi Ralph, what drives you after over 50 years of activism to continue the good fight?"

Ralph Nader: Well, first of all, I don't like white flags of surrender. Second, striving for justice is about the greatest gratification in life. Third, we've won a lot of victories and that alone is enough to keep you going. Glenn Miller, when you get into a vehicle, you are facing an invisible airbag and you put on your seatbelt, so you're much more likely, along with your family and friends to survive a crash. And that was done by citizen action in 1965 and '66. So, there are a lot of improvements in food. The air is cleaner than it would have been. The water is cleaner than it would have been. The freedom of information is much greater than it would have been without these laws supported by a majority of the American people rather quietly but vanguarded by a few small full time citizen groups. I remember a Time Magazine reporter called up my mother in 1966 after, there was a lot of publicity about my fight with General Motors and getting the auto industry regulated for safety and fuel efficiency and pollution control through Congress when Lyndon Johnson signed the law. They wanted to do a cover story, which

they did. And this man asked my mother on the phone, "What makes Ralph tick?" And my mother said, "What makes you not tick?"

(Laughter)

Steve Skrovan: Wow, that's cold.

Ralph Nader: My mother was a woman of few words. By the way, if you look at Time Magazine cover today, civic leaders could never get on the cover. It's one trivia after another. It's almost like a diluted version of People Magazine. And that's what's happened to our media. They have become less and less serious, more and more catering to the kind of frivolous celebrity ridden sensuality.

Steve Skrovan: Well, I have to disagree with you there, Ralph. Time Magazine has put Jesus on the cover a lot. He was a great civic activist. People forget that.

Ralph Nader: Have they really?

Steve Skrovan: Well. They do. Both Newsweek and Time when they really want sales, they'll put religious figures on the cover.

Ralph Nader: That's interesting. They probably did put Pope Francis on, I suppose, yes.

Steve Skrovan: Yes. Okay I'm going to take the next question. Back into electoral politics here. This is from Dominick Grande . His question is: "Hypothetical situation. Rand Paul versus Bernie Sanders - who would you support or vote for?"

Ralph Nader: On foreign policy I'd vote for Rand Paul, on domestic policy hands down Bernie Sanders.

Steve Skrovan: But you can't split them up that way Ralph.

Ralph Nader: Why not?

Steve Skrovan: Because there's not enough room on the ballot.

Ralph Nader: I'd write it in.

Steve Skrovan: Wait a minute. You would say Rand Paul foreign policy, Bernie Sanders, you mean as a ticket?

Ralph Nader: Yeah. Sure, a little electoral culture jamming, you know about that Steve.

Steve Skrovan: Okay.

Ralph Nader: As long as you can write in, you can write in anything. You can say, we the people choose not to vote. Bye.

Steve Skrovan: Who would you put at the top of that ticket of those two?

Ralph Nader: I'd put them on the same plane.

Steve Skrovan: Aw, man...

Ralph Nader: This is all hypothetical, as you know.

Steve Skrovan: It is. Okay. Take the next question, David.

David Feldman: Janine Houle Chapas writes, "Who found out VW was cheating and are other diesel autos going to be checked for the same type of cheating?"

Ralph Nader: They found out VW was cheating, there was a nonprofit technical group in West Virginia working with people at West Virginia University that said, "Holy Mackerel, the emissions of nitrogen oxides are up to 40 times the EPA permitted level from these VW diesel cars." So, that's the way it happened.

Steve Skrovan: John Graves writes, Ralph how influential had George Lakoff's ideas and books been with you, how significant are his truth bombs and communication suggestions for progressives? I'll explain: George Lakoff is a linguist from Berkeley, who has offered a lot of framing ideas for Democrats and liberals to get their ideas across.

Ralph Nader: I've talked with George Lakoff. I think he's a bit too complex in telling the Democrats they're not using people-motivating language as well as the Republicans. He has very thick books, and you tend to lose it. Father-figure figures of speech compared to mother-figure figures of speech. The Republicans use father authority. That's why they get people to vote for them. I think it's a little bit too much, but he did come up with an example of how good he is when he simplifies things. And that is: the Republicans started trying to get the "estate tax" to be labeled the "death tax." And he said, "Well why not call it the 'billionaire's tax.'" When the Republicans try to repeal the estate tax, only a few very rich people are affected, because the estate tax now only applies to people at that time who have an estate over five million bucks or so. He was saying, why not call it -- when the Democrats are opposing the repeal of the estate tax -- they should say, "The Republicans want to repeal the 'billionaire's tax.'" That's an example of his framing. And there are some good things. He has met with a lot of Democratic politicians, so he's got his material across. It's not like he's being ignored. But he is right. The Democrats are not as astute in the use of language as the Republicans.

Steve Skrovan: And you've actually met with him, talked with him?

Ralph Nader: I've talked with him on the phone, yes.

Steve Skrovan: And so, I guess the proper question is how much has George Lakoff's ideas been influenced by you?

Ralph Nader: I don't know. I think, for example, I coined the phrase "corporate welfare" that is now widely used even by Libertarians and right-wingers, although they often call it "crony capitalism." I gave currency to the phrase "corporate crime" when it used to be called "white collar crime." And there is such a thing as a corporate crime wave. Bill Safire attributes the phrase "mainstream media" to me, although I can't really recall that I was the first to put it in wide circulation. So, tried my bit. I don't like the word "private sector" when it really means "corporate sector." I don't like the words "defoliation" when it means "chemical warfare" in Vietnam by our airplanes dropping toxic chemicals on villages there. So, we do have to change the language, because the Pentagon has a whole dictionary of euphemisms and "defoliation" is just one of 'em. One of my favorite is when they allowed Pentagon contractors to pay \$450 for a \$10 claw hammer you could get at a hardware store. And they paid it. And they allowed the contractors to call the claw hammer a "unidirectional impact generator."

David Feldman: Is that really true? Or is that...?

Ralph Nader: It's absolutely true. I did the research on it, and I saw. What happened was the prime contractor went to a subcontractor - you know how they divide up the contract - who went to another subcontractor, who went to a subcontractor that bought the hammers. And then as it goes back up to the prime contractor, they put the mark ups.

David Feldman: Wow.

Ralph Nader: Listen David, wouldn't you pay \$450 for a unidirectional impact generator?

Steve Skrovan: I wouldn't know how to plug it in.

Ralph Nader: Think what you could do to, what's the name of that dog you have a program with?

David Feldman: Triumph?

Ralph Nader: Triumph. Think what you could do to Triumph. You just wrap it two inches from Triumph's toes and Triumph would shut up for a change.

Steve Skrovan: Why show - that's a debate I wanna see. Well, I guess that has happened, the Ralph/Triumph show. David, take the next question. We're almost done.

David Feldman: I'm trying to come up with a name for a nail. Well, Ellyn Berkowitz Silverman says, "Thank you for being at the marijuana business conference. You're inspiring. Keep spreading the word. What is your position on marijuana? Because I know that Governor Jerry Brown said, he's not so certain it's a good idea that people are high all the time, that it wouldn't be good for democracy.

Ralph Nader: Well, I have always been against addictions. I urge people not to succumb to addictions, whether it's tobacco, alcohol, marijuana, heroin, cocaine. I just think it destroys their life's possibilities and produces a lot of anguish as well as loss of life and sickness increases. However, I've learned from studying the history of our country's Prohibition of alcohol that all it does is drive it underground and

produce an underworld and a lot of disrespect for the law and a lot of law enforcement devoted to arresting people for personal addictions. And I don't think we send people to jail for being tobacco addicts. And we don't send people to jail for being alcohol addicted. Why should we send people to jail for being non-violent users of hard drugs, instead of looking at this as a health problem and putting it publicly on the table so we can help people at clinics drop the habit? Most people in their better moments don't really like to be addicted. And they would like to be helped and should be a health cause, a health movement. And that's what I told the people at the marijuana conference. That means you decriminalize marijuana. You regulate it. You tax it. You make sure it's not adulterated with harmful substances, for example. That's what we're doing now finally with tobacco with the FDA. And then I said to them, "You know liberating marijuana from the criminal law is also a gift to prison reform, because so many non-violent marijuana users are in jail. And it's also a gift to our civil liberties." So, they all come together; and I think we can advance our civil liberties and reform our criminal justice system and put the issue of widespread addiction due to a whole variety of substances - some are already legal like alcohol and tobacco - and make them the focus of the health movement, of rehabilitation, of a compassionate arm around the shoulder.

David Feldman: Would you support a war on guns to replace our war on drugs?

Ralph Nader: I made that point earlier in this program in terms of assault weapons being prohibited, bazookas, tanks being prohibited, license and registration.

David Feldman: We can't win a war on drugs. I just worry that the war on guns would just be a nightmare.

Ralph Nader: You wouldn't drive them underground, because they'd still be legal. They just have to be registered. And people would have to show that they're trained to use them. There are a lot of people who don't put their guns away in cupboards and therefore five-year olds shoot three-year olds when the parents are away. It happens all the time. Do we want that? In Canada and Western Europe you have to lock up or you have to put them out of the reach of children the way you have to put medicines out of the reach of children.

Steve Skrovan: Dario Ai R C writes, "Ralph, you supported the 1978 airline deregulation act. In hindsight, was that a good idea?"

Ralph Nader: Very good idea but the two conditions that I established when I testified before Congress was: deregulation, antitrust enforcement, and strong safety enforcement. Unfortunately, they didn't do antitrust enforcement. So before deregulation, we had a small number of airlines, who wouldn't let any other airlines get in to the business. After deregulation, we had new airlines like People's Airline, like

Southwest Airline and a lot of people got more opportunities to fly at lower prices. And then the merger movement started. And the Department of Transportation and the Justice Department approved over 34 mergers between airlines, so that now we're down to four or five dominant airlines just like we were before deregulation. However, they don't have quite the pricing power that they had before deregulation, because Southwest Airline and these new cut rate airlines like Spirit are challenging any attempt to try to have fixed across the board collusion by airlines like Delta, United and American. So, we've got to keep the doors open for competition and organize an airline passengers action group with chapters all over the country to deal with service abuses, tight knees space, and other shenanigans that all the airlines except Southwest, which is my favorite airline, try to get away with again and again. Baggage fees and pretty soon they'll charge you a fee for going to the restroom. So, Southwest has a no fee policy. We should support companies that tell you how much it's going to cost upfront. And they don't trick you with a fee here and a fee there. Thank you for your question.

Steve Skrovan: That's our show. Thank you for your questions.

David Feldman: A transcript of this episode will be posted on ralphnaderradiohour.com.

Steve Skrovan: For Ralph's weekly blog, go to nader.org.

David Feldman: For more from Russell Mokhiber go to corporatecrimreporter.com.

Steve Skrovan: Remember to visit the country's only law museum, the American Museum of Tort Law in Winsted, Connecticut go to tortmuseum.org.

David Feldman: The producers of the Ralph Nader Radio Hour are Jimmy Lee Wirt and Matthew Marran.

Steve Skrovan: Join us next week when we talk Joanne Doroshow from the Center for Justice and Democracy about protecting our civil justice system. And also we'll have on author Steven Hill who wrote *Raw Deal: How the Uber Economy and Runaway Capitalism Are Screwing the American Worker*. On behalf of David Feldman I'm Steve Skrovan. Talk to you next week, Ralph.

Ralph Nader: Thank you. Yes, listen next week to Joanne Doroshow about how to defend yourself, if you're wrongfully injured, and you have your day in court. Thank you very much David and Steve. And thank WPKN, our newest station in Bridgeport, Connecticut.

