

## RALPH NADER RADIO HOUR EP 357 TRANSCRIPT

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

*"Stand up, stand up  
You've been sitting way too long"*

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

**David Feldman:** Thank you, happy New Year to everybody.

**Steve Skrovan:** Yeah, we hope it's slightly more prosperous and safe new year. We also of course, to help us get us through it again the man of the hour Ralph Nader. Hello Ralph.

**Ralph Nader:** Hello everybody.

**Steve Skrovan:** We have a great show today as usual. November's election gave us a Democratic lead in the House, a Republican lead in the Senate, and a new President-elect in Joe Biden. We've already seen vital COVID relief legislation passed in the House, and then stall in Mitch McConnell's Senate. So, as we start a new congressional session we'll be talking about what the Democratic leadership in the House hopes to accomplish. As we record this program it looks like the Democrats will sweep a Georgia runoff and gain narrow control of the Senate. How will that affect how the party approaches issues like raising the federal minimum wage, improving access to affordable health care, the size of scope in the next stimulus package, infrastructure, the fate of Social Security? What will they do to mitigate the effects of climate change? Now that the balance of power has apparently shifted, will their agenda be ambitious enough or will they find new excuses to do very little? To help us sort all that out on the show today we have summoned to our little virtual town hall Democratic Congressman John Larson who in addition has joined a chorus of Congress people in denouncing President Trump's recent attempts to manipulate election results and defy congressional authority. As we record this, he'll be on his way to witnessing that. We will also be joined as usual by our corporate crime reporter Russell Mokhiber. And we're gonna have some time left over (when) I'm sure Ralph will answer your listener questions. But first let's hear from the man tasked with representing Ralph Nader's home district in Connecticut, David?

**David Feldman:** Congressman John Larson represents Connecticut's First District and is the chair of the House Ways and Means Social Security Subcommittee, is the author of the Social Security 2100 Act, which has been co-sponsored by more than 200 other members of the House and endorsed by groups including Public Citizen, the N.A.A.C.P., the National Organization for Women, and the A.F.L.-C.I.O.. Welcome to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour* Congressman John Larson.

**Congressman John Larson:** Great to be with you guys.

**Ralph Nader:** Welcome indeed, John. For listeners, John Larson is my Congressman and we've worked together on a number of issues over the years. It looks like John that the Democrats are gonna have a 50/50 control over the Senate with Vice President Kamala Harris breaking the tie. So, it looks like Senator Chuck Schumer will be the majority leader and Mitch McConnell will be

relegated to the minority, fortunately. So, this opens up with the House Democratic control and the Senate and a president who is Democrat, Joe Biden, for long overdue action. Number one, public hearings which educate the public, and number two legislation. So, there are a number of issues I want to run by you that I think are dear to your heart. Let's start with the number one issue that you've been identified with; what would you like this bill that you've introduced on Social Security to do for millions of elderly people or soon-to-be-elderly people?

**Congressman John Larson:** Well as you know Ralph, Social Security, and now the last time Congress did anything major with it was 38 years ago. Thirty-eight years ago, it compromised as they rightfully should and had a bipartisan bill but had many weaknesses. So Social Security has not been expanded the way that it needs to be. It is the lifeline for the American people; it's our number one insurance program. Both you and I have spent a lot of time talking to the people and reminding them that as Republicans try to say that Social Security is an entitlement and of course it is not. It is an insurance program easily identified by looking at your pay stub that says FICA [Federal Insurance Contributions Act]. Whose? Yours. The American public understand this and know, but we haven't made the kind of adjustments that need to be made. We have more than five million Americans who have worked hard all their lives [and] paid into the system, but receive a below poverty level check from Social Security. Our goal is to enhance the program, make it actuarially sound, which is critical to its success now and in the future, but also expand this so that nobody who works all their lives depending on their job. And in most cases it affects women and specifically women of color, and Black males who have been hurt the most by this. And we're out to correct it. John Lewis would say when he was on the committee, God rest his soul, that this is the next major civil rights issue because of the way the program has discriminated. What it would require is just the changes in the law that will expand Social Security benefits that will make sure that no one can retire into poverty, and make sure, of course, that we're enhancing those benefits to the individuals in a very modest way. No one is gonna get wealthy on Social Security, but everybody should be receiving above poverty level checks so they can survive today.

**Ralph Nader:** You're gonna increase revenues, I take it, by making FICA more progressive? How are you gonna take it on an income above a hundred thousand?

**Congressman John Larson:** We're gonna do it two ways. The first way--we're in discussion with the Biden Administration with this as well--we're gonna lift the cap on people making 400,000 and above and then have that cap move both ways progressively down as well, so that we're able to get the kind of money... a person making more than \$400,000 ought to be paying the same rate that someone making \$50,000 is. That will provide us with the revenue because the design of the program has always been intended to be a pay-as-you-go program and staggered in such a manner that it works for everyone.

**Ralph Nader:** Okay, you're on House Ways and Means Committee; Richard Neal from Western Massachusetts is the chairman. We've all been concerned how the Republicans have starved the I.R.S. budget which is now at 2011 levels and thousands of I.R.S. people have been laid off. The I.R.S. says that they are unable to collect over 400 billion dollars, billion with a B, a year in uncollected taxes. I don't think the Democrats have increased the I.R.S. budget enough to return it to a capability where it can answer phone calls for example without waiting for days to service tax payers, but also collect more money from these multinational global corporations. The audit level of these large corporations and the mega, mega millionaires is at an all-time low. What are you proposing Congressman John Larson, in terms of increasing the I.R.S. budget, which is now

only about 11 and a half or so billion dollars less than the cost of one aircraft carrier?

**Congressman John Larson:** Well, we're talking about going back and looking at the whole Tax Reform Act that the Republicans enacted in 2017, and having a wholesale change of that and including and as part of that, looking at the I.R.S. You're absolutely right in terms of how they've been defunded. And what we need to do is make sure that we're funding them at a level, and especially so that all corporations... there should be a bare minimum they have to pay. I don't care how many lawyers and accountants they can hire. We belong to a country that serves and protects, and provides the kind of climate for people to prosper and grow. You know Ralph better than anyone else the prosperity that exists today is just, I'm proud to say that a lot of people, even a friend, I know you know Bob Patricelli as well, former of CEO of Cigna who said, "Listen, we've got to change this. Let's take the idea and concept of entrepreneurialism and capitalism and make sure that everybody participates in it." We're gonna be introducing legislation on that that will require, if you're gonna be able to get a capital gains and dividends break, you've got to make sure that you're also providing your employees with those stock options where they can grow their own, personal wealth and shift a lot of this that's going on. But there's gonna be massive change in terms of both tackling the tax code issues and changing the revenues there again. That will be a major fight. We have control of both the House and the Senate but it's by very slim margins that we'll control both [with] obviously the Vice President [Harris] breaking a tie in the Senate. We have, as of today, 222 members in the House and as you know it takes 218 to pass a bill.

**Ralph Nader:** You know, it's encouraging you say that because Congressman Neal, one of the first things he said when he took over as Chair of the House Ways and Means Committee [House Committee on Ways and Means] was that he was not gonna revisit the Trump tax cuts which are over ten years, two trillion dollars, and that was really disappointing to some of us. It's good that he is now gonna take the lead and restore it because all the COVID-19 necessities, you can't simply fund these by deficit funding consul. You've got to raise revenue, and they never even needed it, these corporations, the two-trillion-dollar tax cut.

**Congressman John Larson:** I think you raise a valid point there, too, because the focus that we have to have initially, and I don't return home when I don't hear from people. I'm tired of the squabbling; I'm tired of the bipartisan chatter. People are dying. What are you doing about COVID? I think that first and foremost, probably heard it in Nancy Pelosi's remarks the other night, and certainly that is gonna be the focus of the Ways and Means Committee as much as we have a lot of important issues that you can do a lot of this simultaneously as well. But the initial thrust and emphasis is gonna be on directly tackling this pandemic, making sure that we're getting the relief out to the states that they need to coordinate in such a manner. I mean I don't know why we haven't gone to the Defense Production Act and utilize the Defense Logistics Agency, especially as it relates to vaccines and getting those vaccines out there as well. Then also getting money back into the hands of people. Now I would argue that another way to do that is through Social Security. But no matter how you shape or scope it, you've got to get money back into the hands of people and then also put the country back to work by way of massive infrastructure which we talked about [that] the House has passed, but now we have the ability to do that. Then all of that, as you point out, is going to have to have us turn back to the revenue side and look at the fairness of that, that Obama proposed taxes as well. We ought to go back and take a look at what Obama was proposing and including incentives in there for manufacturers, especially of goods made here in our country. We're gonna be putting Americans back to work, et cetera, but also

stepping up on the infrastructure requirements, not just roads, bridges, harbours, airports, but schools as well.

**Ralph Nader:** It's amazing how a lot of these giant companies are making record profits. Some of them don't pay any taxes. Some pay two percent; some pay eight percent. The banks for example, the global corporations, they've gamed it; they have tax havens overseas. All of that should be on the table and produce, as you say, the kind of revenue to rebuild the infrastructure, the schools, bridges, public transit, the public libraries, community health clinics, sewage, drinking water systems. These are good-paying jobs that can't be exported and they're in every community. You've been identified with supporting unions and labor law reform, Congressman Larson, has not been on the table for years. The notorious Taft-Hartley Act of 1947, which has been a stranglehold on the right of the American workers to organize and to have functional unions, has never been really challenged even when the Democrats controlled the Congress and the presidency like 2009, 2010. Are you interested in supporting long-overdue labor law reform?

**Congressman John Larson:** Well I'm always interested in labor reform especially as it relates to working people. You know, growing up in a town like I did in East Hartford, [with] a father who worked three jobs, including at Pratt & Whitney Aircraft where, as we like to say, we keep the eagle flying, et cetera, how deep and how far we're gonna be able to go, I think depends, and you mentioned this at the outset, you're one of the few people, and I say this in terms of not just flattering you, but rightfully so, who understands the depth and breadth of these issues. And what they need are public hearings so that the public gets to understand, to find out about what the disparity is that exists and how we [need to] move to correct these. It's a big agenda. It's a big agenda for the House; it's a big agenda for the ways and means committee, and certainly a big agenda for the Judiciary, and Labor and Ed Committee as well, all of which I think should be having hearings on these things. Then the focus will depend on the depth and the understanding, and what we can actually get done in a very limited time with small numbers.

**Ralph Nader:** Yeah, and of course I think the House, which passed a \$15 [hourly] minimum wage, but it doesn't all go into effect until about 2026. They ought to shorten that so it goes into effect faster in a staged manner.

**Congressman John Larson:** Now especially with the Senate where we know the bill - you know this - but most of the listeners don't know that Mitch McConnell has never taken up 475 bills. When I'm talking about bills, I'm talking about universal background checks on guns, prescription drugs, and 70% of the bills were bipartisanly achieved!

**Ralph Nader:** That's the untold story of Mitch McConnell. He prides himself when he's campaigning in Kentucky, he calls himself the "grim reaper" and the "guardian of gridlock." Those are his words.

**Congressman John Larson:** Exactly and you're right, he does pride himself. I will say this, because I don't want the opportunity to pass, that at least he held his ground electorally with Trump. He did not cave in to the peaceful, what should be the peaceful transition of power. Instead today, and in fact in ten minutes we'll be convening on the floor of the House to take up the results of the Electoral College. We're anticipating a fight from some Republican senators and of course more than a hundred and thirty members of the Republican House of representatives who are ---

**Ralph Nader:** Astonishing.

**Congressman John Larson:** It is astonishing.

**Ralph Nader:** No one would have predicted this complete violation of constitutional standards.

**Congressman John Larson:** When you have Al Gore as an example, gaveling down Jessy Jackson Jr. in 2001, who was saying this election was fraudulent. He said the election results were in, the Electoral College has spoken, a peaceful transition of government goes forward, the results are in, and announces George Bush.

**Ralph Nader:** Even though there were terrible shenanigans in Florida.

**Congressman John Larson:** There were, Oh God yes.

**Ralph Nader:** As you know Connecticut is a big defense industry state. You have the Electric Boat Company General Dynamics building subs near New London. You have United Technologies. Senator Ribicoff was quite concerned during the Vietnam War of a conversion policy. He thought that the Congress should start talking about converting some of the military budget into infrastructure. So instead of building another submarine which I don't think we need; a trident submarine, John, as you know can destroy 200 cities in the world in less than two hours, one trident submarine! [Instead] they would build mass transit technology, all kinds of infrastructure. And I think we can start with a common ground on this, which is since 1992, the Pentagon has not obeyed the budget law, which says it has to tell Congress its audited data. It's got to provide, like all of the departments and agencies that comply now with the 1992 act, with an auditable budget. The pentagon secretaries keep saying, "yeah we'll do it. It's complicated; we'll do them four years; we'll do them five years". They paid 400 million dollars to outside audit firms to try to do the Marine Corps budget as starters. There are some Democrats and Republicans in the Congress as you know, who are trying to make this happen. Compliance with the 1992 act will save a lot of money, will squeeze a lot of waste, fraud and abuse out of the military budget. Are you part of that group by the way? If not, don't you think this is the opportune time to have the Pentagon comply?

**Congressman John Larson:** I think the Pentagon should always comply, there's no question about that. But I am also part of the group I head up, a caucus that focuses on air power as you might imagine, which is critical to us, and have been a strong proponent of the F-22, the F-35. And I have supported, to be quite blunt and truthful, Joe Courtney in his attempts with our sub base. These are critical to the state of Connecticut's economy not just in the manufacturers themselves. But when you look at those supply chains, I have more suppliers for the submarines in the first congressional district than we have for F-35's, we'll say. These are all good-paying, industrial blue-collar jobs for our citizens. That's, I think, there has to be a balance that's exerted there. You can't find a more honourable guy in Congress, and a straighter shooter than Joe Courtney.

**Ralph Nader:** Well you know members of Congress are sort of trapped because the military budget has become a jobs budget. The military companies tell you what congressional district, how many jobs for any kind of weapons system. There are retired generals and admirals who are free to talk who think that we've overdone it, that we have far more weapons of mass destruction than we need, and that it's time to scale down and bring back some of the soldiers from places that are boomeranging against our national security, and start investing in solar energy technology, in mass transit technology, in agricultural soil erosion technology. The airports and the dams, all

these are good paying jobs. Ideally John, I think you would prefer that.

**Congressman John Larson:** No, and I would say this, too, and there is a way for them both to exist. The question becomes, and that's where you started this from, you have to have the kind of audits that again can denote the fraud abuse and the ways and show. That's where the former generals and admirals, et cetera, can come in handy and there's no exception in the federal government whether it's the military, which is an extraordinarily large budget, or wherever fraud, abuse or waste and inefficiency lie, we ought to be taking a look at it. You're also right in terms of this being a jobs bill for so many people and so many, as you point out, probably receive the I.A.M.'s [International Association of Machinists and Aerospace workers] endorsement every year that I've run since I was a councilman in East Hartford for God's sake, because of understanding the importance that Pratt Whitney and machinists bring to the production of the greatest engines made anywhere in the world, are made in East Hartford, Connecticut. That creates a dilemma, but it's one that a learned scholarly person like yourself is able to go in and splice, and define. But trying to manipulate a body of 435 people and all their differences gets tougher. But having said that, all the more reason why you have to look towards accountability. And it's why, I mean, I think your career has been stellar in terms of pointing out the inadequacies and inefficiencies that have existed, and what we can do, but again as you point out, without throwing the baby out with the bath water. By that I mean we still want to have people working and in high-paying jobs. Same thing with climate change and how do we... I'm a strong proponent of a carbon facts, and what we need to do in utilizing the money. So, if you can't have a transition of a coal miner out of a job and into something that's gonna provide an income and put food on the table for his family, you're not gonna get very far with that.

**Ralph Nader:** You know you've been around long. You won your election by 63% of the vote on November 3rd. You've been around, Congressman Larson, long enough to remember that New York City ordered a huge number of subway trains, and there wasn't a single U.S. bidder. They came from Canada and other places because our civilian technology capabilities is so bad on this. I'm glad you're interested but public hearings are in transition on conversion the way Senator Ribicoff envisioned, you've been a leader in reasserting the authority of congress vis-à-vis the executive branch. Most people don't know that even in your own district. We've talked about that; the Congress itself is atrophied, has abdicated its constitutional authority again and again. It has let Trump spend money unauthorized, start wars unauthorized. It's let all kinds of constitutional duties of Congress be abdicated to the White House, the imperial presidency, some scholars call it. You've introduced HR. 111, which says that when the presidency, the executive branch defies congressional subpoenas, that those acts constitute an impeachable offense, and we hope that there will be hearings on this.

**Congressman John Larson:** Yes, Bill Pascrell is taking over the Oversight Committee on the Ways and Means Committee and has said that he definitely wants to look at this. Also I think there's gonna be no shortage of people looking at the current administration including a petition that's going around on censorship as we speak based on what just transpired this week in Georgia with their Secretary of State Raffensperger who probably should be up for a Profile in Courage Award, and Sterling, I think it's Gabriel Sterling, their Chief Elections Officer.

**Ralph Nader:** That was quite remarkable of the Republican officials. It does point to the need to bring Trump and his cohorts to justice. They have been involved in all kinds of criminal acts violating the anti-deficiency statute, the F.I.S.A. statute, other statutes, the statute against using

federal property for political purposes called the Hatch Act. All these are felonies and they have jail terms. I hope that Joe Biden does not do what Barack Obama says when he was asked, are you gonna pursue the law through the Justice Department on the Bush Regime? He said, "No, I'm not going to look backward." Well, if you let Trump and the Trumpsters get away with these violations, never mind the constitutional violations, you are really showing that the president is above the law, and you're really showing that Congress is not doing its constitutional duty of bringing these acts under the rubric of legal accountability. So, I hope the House Judiciary Committee, and now the Senate Judiciary Committee is going to move on this. And your colleague Senator Blumenthal has told me that he's interested in looking at the federal corporate criminal code because there are a lot of agencies like the F.A.A. on the 737 Max and the auto safety, they have no criminal accountancy for wilful and knowing violation of safety standards that take human lives.

**Congressman John Larson:** No one better and as you pointed out that he, that Blumenthal also, as you know, also serve and worked for Senator Ribicoff as well. Dick [Senator Richard Blumenthal] has been a champion along those fronts as well so we look forward to it. Ralph, I apologize but we are convening the joint session as we speak, and it's about a six-minute walk for me so I'm going to have to run, but it's always a pleasure to chat with you. Stay the course.

**Ralph Nader:** Thank you very much. We've been talking with Congressman John Larson and we hope to connect with you on a lot of good congressional hearings to educate the public for a new wave of executive and congressional accountability for the American people. Thank you very much John.

**Congressman John Larson:** God bless.

**Steve Skrovan:** We have been speaking with Congressman John Larson. We will link to his page at [RalphNaderRadioHour.com](http://RalphNaderRadioHour.com).

**Ralph Nader:** I'll tell you, if anybody had a valid excuse to shorten the interview, going to the historic counting of the Electoral College votes, where the Republicans are gonna try to overturn the result of the election, is pretty high up on the priority list here.

**Steve Skrovan:** Yeah, I guess we'll give him a pass on that. We'll give him a pass on that. Ralph I have a question for you in light of this interview. David brought this up before the show started, [i.e.,] this is a narrow majority that the Democrats have. What role does the filibuster play in this? Will the Republicans still be able to block things? How do you see this dynamic playing out?

**Ralph Nader:** Well, if the Democrats hold firm in the House they can't block it, there is no filibuster in the House and it can just put through the House, pretty much, what they want unless there are defections from the Blue Dog Democrats. That's the danger. They have about a nine or ten seat gap which is very narrow, which means six Blue Dogs can turn the tide. They will always be telling Speaker Pelosi, don't do this, don't do that because we may not support you and we may lose the next election in our conservative district. So, there's an answer to all that and that is to have a real progressive, people-oriented agenda where you don't have to worry about Blue Dog Democrats because you'll have far more seats separating yourself as Democratic Party from the Republicans. The Democrats haven't learned that lesson yet, that single payer for everybody, very efficient lifesaving, less bureaucracy, covering everybody is increasingly moving towards 70% in the polls. That's a lot of conservatives. And living wage that's over 70% in the polls.

Infrastructure investment instead of military waste investment and corporate tax escapes in the hundreds of billions of dollars that comes in at over 80% breaking up the big, concentrated monopolies comes in very high with a lot of conservatives and liberals. When the Democrats learn that lesson, there won't be that squeaky, tiny difference between them in the votes in the House of Representatives. Over in the Senate, it all depends on whether they're gonna restore the rules where they can filibuster judges, filibuster anybody. And, I don't think they're gonna do that. I think that now the Democrats are going to say, "Okay, the Republicans got away with it, over 200 federal judges without having a filibuster, right. We're gonna get our judges through by 51% of the Senate. And the other thing they're gonna do, if they restore the tax cuts, they can't do it if there's a filibuster. They don't have 60 votes. So they're gonna have to do it the way the Republicans got the tax cuts, which is under some reconciliation bill that only requires 51 votes out of 100. So that's a long answer to the following conclusion. It all depends on the Blue Dog Democrats. Someone just called up from West Virginia and said, "It looks like the Democrats are going to control the Senate, and it looks like Joe Manchin is the most powerful Democrat in the Senate. Well he is a Blue Dog Senator from West Virginia. That's what we have to look forward to in terms of whether anything is going to get done in a more fundamental way.

**Steve Skrovan:** Well in my estimation Ralph, you've always talked about the Democrats should run and vote yourself a raise. And, this Georgia runoff, I think, had a lot to do with vote yourself a stimulus check. And you would hope that those Blue Dogs would take that to heart, that things like raising the federal minimum wage and all of these other issues that really are kitchen table issues for people would prevail because they saw it work.

**Ralph Nader:** Not only they saw it work Steve, but all these stimulus bills are supported by the Chamber of Commerce back in local America. They're supported by unions; they're supported by small business. That's a huge coalition. Along with the workers, and the consumers, and the poor, and the unemployed, it's a huge coalition. Now they don't have to worry about Mitch McConnell standing like a vicious rock of Gibraltar against 400 bills. They're gonna get a lot of these bills, and a lot of really good bills that affect people's daily livelihoods and in health and safety and children protection. They'll get those through, because the Republicans will put their finger to the wind and say, hey, you know back home this is 70, it comes in 70%; it comes in 80%, so I better get on board.

**David Feldman:** How worried are you that the Democrats don't go big and they end up losing the House and the Senate in two years because there's nothing to show for it and they've given the Republicans something to run against?

**Ralph Nader:** Yeah, I'm quite concerned by that. If they lose the Blue Dog Democrats they're not really in control of Congress, the Republicans are. So they'll have an effective (or in effect a veto). Joe Biden has got to be a different Joe Biden because when I knew him in the Senate, he was a real problem. He was "On one hand"/"On the other." He'd be conservative - he'd be liberal and unpredictable. He knows now that the country is facing an abyss in so many ways. He's got to do more than Franklin Delano Roosevelt. He has got to martial a new coalition which I've just described, and be very aware that public investment in people and in the United States public works or infrastructure is a winning political strategy, and is a winning economic strategy, and is a winning humanitarian strategy, no holds barred. That means he's got to squeeze billions of dollars from the Pentagon budget, and there's plenty of audits, GAO audits and others that document that. It also means that he's got to restore the tax rate on corporations and the rich to



where it was in the prosperous 1960's, which will release hundreds and hundreds of billions of dollars a year to reinvest in America, at the community level where people live, work and raise their families. That is a winning political strategy, but not if you're indentured to rich campaign contributions and you spend too much time with the Park Avenue crowd and the Silicon Valley crowd. So it's up to us to send this kind of message to our two senators and representatives, and there's only 535 of them. As I've said many times listeners, just raise your expectations and send those higher expectations to your two senators and representatives and to the White House, learn the number of the White House switchboard and flood it with your demands. Long overdue, you've earned it. The time has come for the people to reassert their sovereignty under the Constitution.

**Steve Skrovan:** Well Ralph, we've now seen Joe Biden starting to assemble his cabinet and his other advisers. What do you see in that? Is there anything that gives you hope, or is it indicating, this is the old Joe Biden?

**Ralph Nader:** Well, it's not very encouraging so far. He has more diversity--Hispanic, African American. The question is whether there's any difference to the diversity. Is the first Black Secretary of Defense gonna make any difference, or he's gonna run the Defense Department under the influence of the Military Industrial Complex the way his White predecessors did? So when we talk diversity, we have to expand the phrase. Is this kind of diversity gonna produce a difference? Now so far we now know who the new Attorney General is gonna be, former Federal Circuit Judge Merrick Garland who was slated to be appointed by Barack Obama for the Supreme Court and was sidelined by Senator Mitch McConnell and his obstruction. Well this is quite a surprising nomination. I thought maybe Senator Doug Jones was gonna get it, who was a prosecutor of civil rights violators in the South. We now have Merrick Garland. Well, we will have somebody who knows what the rule of law is. We'll have somebody who has a considerable intellect. We'll have somebody who knows what the federal courts should be doing, and should not be doing in terms of their overreach. We now know that we'll have an attorney general who will stand up against an outlaw presidency such as Trump, and Clinton, and Bush and Obama, and Trump of course more extreme. What we don't know is his level of determination to prosecute the crooks that took over our federal government, gave it to the big corporations, enriched themselves, violated federal criminal statutes, violated congressional subpoenas and demands for testimony, and turned around, and expect a get out of jail free card. That's gonna be the big test of Judge Merrick Garland. If he does not bring these people to justice without any interference from the White House on his own recognisance, he will be lowering the bar such as never before in American history for the successors who come in to run the executive branch into the ground illegally in the future.

**Steve Skrovan:** Ralph what do you think best use to Bernie Sanders is? We talked about possibly Secretary of Labor and then there's also Chairman of the Budget Committee. If Biden were to use Bernie Sanders for one of those positions, or any position for that matter, where do you think he'd be best used?

**Ralph Nader:** Well Joe Biden prides himself on extending a hand across the aisle as he puts it, to his Republican opponents. But he hasn't extended much of a hand to Bernie Sanders who certainly got far more votes in the primaries until his base collapsed when Biden won South Carolina. But up until South Carolina, Bernie had gotten far more votes by the American People than Joe Biden who had a very limp campaign until then. He has earned his back on Bernie. Bernie wants to be secretary of labor. That's clear. Joe Biden is not gonna appoint him secretary of labor. The AFL-

CIO is not supporting Bernie Sanders who was on the picket lines, before some of these guys were born, supporting labor unions; they're supporting some person from Massachusetts. That leaves Bernie Sanders with a very powerful post if he is allowed to take it which is Chairman of the Senate Budget Committee.

**Steve Skrovan:** So, what does that mean? What does that give him power over?

**Ralph Nader:** That means that although he doesn't control appropriation policy, he can start making a big deal out of the imbalance of the federal budget in the direction of the swollen, bloated military budget. He can deal with the proper allocation of public budgets, as if people matter first, and as if corporations are designed to be our servants not our masters. So this is a good spot for him. He can get I think a lot of media coverage on this IF Schumer does not try to undermine Bernie Sanders.

**David Feldman:** Is Trump gonna end up being Biden's best friend by creating a crack-up in the Republican Party? When you look at what's happening in Georgia, a) did Trump play a major role in Georgia in the runoff? And will we see defections? Do you know of any Republicans who are thinking of leaving the party or caucusing with the Democrats?

**Ralph Nader:** Well not in any liberal Republican defection sense. What we've seen very recently is pardoned Michael Flynn talking to a gathering outside in Washington, D.C. and saying if the Republican Party doesn't shape up, we're gonna form our own party. That means a party on the right wing, of the right-wing Republican Party, which might weaken the Republican Party in elections against the Democratic Party. So we're not gonna see an Eliot Richardson [Jim] Saltonstall-type liberal Republican Party.

**David Feldman:** Isn't a Jeffords, wasn't there?

**Ralph Nader:** Yeah. We're not gonna see that kind of defection, at least there are no signs of it. The defection will come from the extreme right wing if it comes.

**Steve Skrovan:** You talked about extending a hand reaching across the aisle. It always makes me think that the Republicans are good at extending a hand, reaching across the aisle, grabbing the Democrat by the throat and dragging them over to the other side.

**Ralph Nader:** Yeah, well, I just wrote a column which people can get by going to Nader.org. In fact they can sign up for the column free and they'll get it automatically every week. And, I compared the energy levels of the Democratic Party with the energy levels of the Republican Party over the recent decades. And it's no contest, no contest. This Junior Representative called Newt Gingrich starting with one vote, assembled the political power in the House of Representatives to topple Speaker Jim Wright and then topple the successor Speaker Foley, beating him in Spokane, Washington with a candidate selected by Newt Gingrich, and putting himself as Speaker of the House. There is no hundred Democrats that have that kind of energy level. And I'll give other examples as well. Look at the energy level of challenging this election, where there's no basis to challenge it, and no energy level challenging the election of 2000, which was a selection of Bush by the Supreme Court overturning the Florida Supreme Court recount order which was underway. There are all kinds of illegalities and shenanigans that cost Gore the election in Florida. And Gore, dutifully as Vice President signed off as Pence is expected to sign off. But you see there's no energy investigating all the shenanigans under Governor Jeb Bush, George W. Bush's brother and

his notorious Secretary of State, costing thousands of votes with phony rejections of the right to vote by people whose names were similar to ex-felons. I mean it just went on and on, ballot shenanigans.

**Steve Skrovan:** Which were more than allegations. All the Republicans have now are allegations, no evidence. That actually was allegations accompanied by evidence.

**Ralph Nader:** That's right. So its energy level then, it comes right down to 2021. Are they gonna have the energy level? Obviously Speaker Pelosi had Trump nailed on numerous clear-cut, slam dunk impeachable offenses against our Constitution. She had the energy level for Ukraine only, which wasn't exactly a kitchen-table issue for Americans. Congressman John Larson, I wanted to mention, during our interview, put in the *Congressional Record* in December 2019, on our website Nader.org, the "12 impeachable offenses of Donald Trump". He and other members of the Democratic Party thought that Nancy Pelosi went far too narrow in her once in a lifetime opportunity to nail Trump and get him convicted in the Senate because there were so many impeachable offenses that Mitch McConnell would have to have paraded on national television and the trial in the Senate. I don't think he would have survived in the Senate. And anybody who does that, just look at some of the detailed impeachable offenses including his assault on women, including his lies that created dangerous conditions for the American people, all the abuse of trust that Alexander Hamilton pointed to way back as impeachable offenses. So let's look at the energy levels, give them energy listeners. Two senators and representatives. When I talk to them, they say, you know, we're not getting that much feedback from back home. I say, "What? Are you serious? You're just making excuses for yourselves, senators and representatives." They say, "No, we're serious. We get a lot of vituperative or praiseworthy emails." But that's not what they we're talking about. They're talking about sitting down back home instead of just reading and campaign carousing back home with the legislators on serious issues, town meeting type formats, summoning the senators and representatives for the major turnaround in our country, which is long overdue and supported by very large majorities, the American people.

**Steve Skrovan:** Thanks Ralph for that post-mortem. Let's take a short break. When we return, Ralph's gonna answer your listener questions. 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, January 8, 2021. I'm Russell Mokhiber. Tens of thousands of crew ship workers were trapped at sea for months in isolation as crew members began to die, not only from Corona Virus, but from suicide. That's according to an investigative report from Bloomberg News. Before the Corona Virus pandemic came to the United States, the country watched as crew ships first one then several became hotspots for COVID-19. Some passengers died before others were evacuated by their home countries, but crew members that survived COVID-19 faced another danger, isolation. In April, some cruise companies refused to sign agreement with the CDC [Centers for Disease Control] which would hold them accountable for the process of arranging private transportation for crew. Cruise ship company officials complained it was too expensive. 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. Let's do some listener questions, David?

**David Feldman:** First one comes from Tom. He writes, “Ralph, considering the fact that big money donors own the politicians, is it time to start taking protest directly to those donors and their business interests especially when they have product services or retail stores that have the 99% as consumers?”

**Ralph Nader:** Yeah, of course. I mean they should be revealed, they should be held accountable, and they should be questioned. They should be in the media instead of in the shadows, in the back room. For example, a major donor to the Trump Administration is an executive of BlackRock, the huge investment firm. While a lot of people who follow this know who he is and what he’s done, it’s not enough. This should be a top 10 for example. There should be profiles for these people [to help the public consider] why are they doing this? Why should we patronize them? Why should we buy their products? If they want to get into the political fray they ought to be able to take some heat and be held accountable.

**Steve Skrovan:** Does the “Axe the Max campaign” fall into that category, Ralph, would you say?

**Ralph Nader:** Very much so. We’re calling for a consumer boycott of the 737 Max in the interests of air travel safety and in recognition what the grieving families have been organizing on Capitol Hill and on top of these cushy FAA, cushy with Boeing. I’m glad you raised that Steve because a bill actually is about to pass Congress. Both House and Senate have passed an aviation safety bill. It’s not as strong as we would like but it certainly is better than what preceded it. That could never have happened without the families of their loved ones organizing, going into one Senate office after another, one House office after another. My grandniece Samya Stumo who lost her life in Ethiopia in the 737 crash, her parents have done tremendous work right down to the drafting, going over piece by piece. I think that members of the Congress will credit them with this legislation. So, it gives the Biden Administration a chance to overhaul the FAA and turn it more into a regulator instead of an abdicator to Boeing who cut a lot of corners and put a lot of profits back into bonuses and stock buybacks instead of safety engineering.

**Steve Skrovan:** Well, thank you for that question Tom. This next one comes from Robert Bourland and he says “please consider discussion on surprise medical billing. I understand that two private equity firms are behind this, but one out of five emergency room patients are affected and some people are saddled with enormous bills. I realize that corruption is rampant. But seriously, how can this ever be considered legal and justified? Does every Wall Street exploitation scheme start out as legal? Thank you for your outstanding program.

**Ralph Nader:** Thank you, Robert. First of all I object to the use by the media of the term surprise billing. Surprise birthday party has a nice connotation. These are criminal billings. These are gouging billings. They’re, for example, charging somebody \$1800 for a COVID-19 test. That was exposed in the *New York Times*. The *New York Times* reporter Sarah Kliff is starting a beat on exploitive billing. She uses the word surprise, too, which is a right-wing euphemism word, corporate word. So we should get our language straight. We’ve been on computerized billing fraud and abuse as Steve and David know, for years. We even put out a newsletter, one newsletter on billing practices. With the advent of the computer, billing fraud has become hundreds of billions of dollars criminal business. In fact, Professor Malcolm Sparrow at Harvard, and a GAO report in 1992, estimated that ten percent of all health care expenditures go down the drain because of billing fraud and abuse. You know what that is this year? It’s 350 billion dollars, almost a billion dollars a day. Thank you very much and stay tuned. You can go to [Nader.org](http://Nader.org) and look up some of the

articles I've written over the years on massive billing fraud and the need for Congress to hold hearings, the need for budgets to hire more investigators, because every dollar they put on investigators and prosecutors will get 10, 20 dollars back for the consumer and the taxpayer. Indeed the rip off on Medicare alone, according to Medicare itself, is \$60 billion a year in billing fraud shenanigans.

**Steve Skrovan:** That's incredible. I never thought of the language as surprise billing. It's like it's coming out of a cake.

**Ralph Nader:** [laughter] That's right.

**Steve Skrovan:** Putting the piñata and all the bills come out

**David Feldman:** This next one comes to us from Pam Youngquist. She writes, I just wanted to extend immense gratitude to you overall in life, and specifically for your creation of *Animal Envy*. I've just finished it and as an animal and plant activist, I've not found such succinct reporting of the atrocities against these species in all the good books written on the subject. Wish that it would along with other of your books and talks required reading in all school systems ASAP. Thank you for your commitment, your insight and your endurance, Pam Youngquist.

**Ralph Nader:** Well, thank you Pam. She's referring to my book called *Animal Envy* which is a fable. But the technique of a fable allowed a huge amount of experience in terms of what we know when we destroy animals and animal habitats around the planet in terms of boomeranging against us. And of course zoonotic disease, diseases transmitted to humans from animals, have taken hundreds of millions of lives over modern history. Just think of Malaria, for example. It is important to be able to write about it in a way that youngsters can read about it and be educated but be entertained in a constructive way. That's what I tried to do with the book *Animal Envy* which is still available by Seven Stories Press. It's not that long, and I would have hoped that some teachers would have adopted it as reading in school classes, but I don't think that's happening. Thank you for bringing this book to the attention of our listeners Pam.

**Steve Skrovan:** Thank you Pam. Now this next question Ralph we may have covered but there may be a slightly different nuance on it. This comes from a long-time listener Dale West. He says, "EASA [European Union Aviation Safety Agency] Executive Director Patrick Ky has stated that the 737 Max is going to be ungrounded in January." He says, "Why are the civil aviation authorities participants in the, and I don't know what this acronym exactly means, JATR [Joint Authorities Technical Review] Committee, not challenging "Boeing Frankenplane" after none of their recommendations were implemented? Hardware problems need a hardware solution, not a low-regulatory standard software patch.

**Ralph Nader:** Well, the JATR Committee was assembled after the 737 Max crashes by the federal government. It came out with a good report with tough recommendations. There they are, they're still recommendations. So maybe a new F.A.A Chief replacing Steve Dickson under Joe Biden, and stronger assertions by the congressional oversight committees will lead to these recommendations being implemented. Otherwise we're gonna see an expansion of 737 Max planes. They can have 500,000 safe flights Steve and David, but Boeing doesn't get one more crash due to Boeing's instability aerodynamic design. It doesn't get one more crash.

**Steve Skrovan:** Right, yeah, that's kind of like the message is. Okay, we're gonna give you one

more chance. The depression of the travel industry in general, airline industry specifically, probably puts pressure on Congress people to get these planes up in the air. Is that a fair statement?

**Ralph Nader:** I don't think so, because there is so little demand now that the airlines have been mothballing other planes because they can't fill them. They don't really need the 737 Max. However, Boeing is discounting so heavily the price of these planes, and no down payment, easy terms that the airlines are saying, whoa, we can't resist that. The new plane has a little more fuel efficiency, but the risk of another crash--can you imagine the impact on Boeing and the airline industry if it's attributed to that engine mismatch with the fuselage that led to the need for the software, which has its own criticisms, the MCAS [Maneuvering Characteristics Augmentation System]?

**Steve Skrovan:** You don't think that will be an excuse to get this plane up and running because it's there? You think it will have the opposite effect?

**Ralph Nader:** Well, let's put it this way, they don't need it but they're getting such a deal on it in terms of price and terms that they may take it anyway.

**Steve Skrovan:** Right. All right, let's do another question here, this one comes from, and talk about having trouble pronouncing. I hope it get this right, Ioana Saboslai says, "dear Mr. Nader, I came across your work from Nassim Taleb's book *Skin in the Game*. As I am young and based in the E.U., it was for me a great discovery. I looked over the internet to research more about your activist work and contribution. For the moment I am sometimes following *Nader Radio Hour* to remain in touch with the attitude, clarity and truthful voice I would love to encounter more often in this world. Therefore, this is a thank you letter for the model and inspiration you provide in the world.

**Ralph Nader:** Well, thank you very much Ioana. I really appreciate that, having people overseas listen to the radio program is very gratifying. If you want to go to Nader.org, you'll see a lot of what we're doing. You go to Citizen.org, you see what Public Citizen is doing and you can go back as far as you want. There are lists of books that we've put out that may interest you, and spread the word. Thank you very much for listening and reading.

**Steve Skrovan:** You can also go to RalphNaderRadioHour.com. All our shows are archived there. Most of them now have transcripts so you can search by category. There are all different ways to catch up with us and pick a topic; we've probably discussed it. So, thank you for that. I want to thank you for your questions. Keep them coming in the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour* inbox. I want to thank our guest again, Congressman John Larson. For those of you listening on the radio that's our show. For you podcast listeners stay tuned for some bonus material we call "The Wrap Up". A transcript for this show will appear on the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour* website soon after the episode is posted.

**David Feldman:** Subscribe to us on our *Ralph Nader Radio Hour* Youtube channel. For Ralph's weekly column, it's free, go to Nader.org. For more from Russell Mokhiber, go to CorporateCrimeReporter.com.

**Steve Skrovan:** For a copy of *The Day the Rats Vetoed Congress*, go to RatsformCongress.org. Also check out the *Ralph Nader and Family Cookbook: Classic Recipes from Lebanon and Beyond*. We will link to both of those.

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

**Steve Skrovan:** Our theme music “Stand up, Rise up” was written and performed by Kemp Harris. Our proofreader is Elisabeth Solomon. Our production assistant, welcome Hannah Feldman.

**David Feldman:** Join us next week on the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour* when we welcome John C. Coffee, Columbia University professor and author of *Corporate Crime and Punishment*. Thank you Ralph.

**Ralph Nader:** Thank you everybody for an invigorating program. Next week you’ll see the nation’s expert on corporate crime on our program. As an addendum to one of our questions on the Boeing 737 Max, please help the grieving families in their quest for safer air travel and boycotting the 737 Max. Go to [Nader.org](http://Nader.org) to see how you can get buttons titled “Axe the Max”. Put them up on the internet and spread the word.

*“Stand up  
You know what’s right and you know what’s wrong  
Rise up  
Don’t let the system pull you down  
Stand up, stand up  
You’ve been sitting way too long  
Stand up  
Oh you should  
Step up  
Step up  
I think that you should step up  
Rise up  
Rise up and take all that power  
Stand up, stand up  
You’ve been sitting way too long  
Stand up”*