

## RALPH NADER RADIO HOUR EP 414 TRANSCRIPT

**Tom Morello:** I'm Tom Morello and you're listening to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*.

music “Stand Up Stand Up”

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

**David Feldman:** Hello, Steve.

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

**Ralph Nader:** Hello, everybody.

**Steve Skrovan:** Does anyone actually wanna go to war over Ukraine right now? The United States doesn't. We have no real national interest in Ukraine worth dying for. Russia doesn't. Economic sanctions and military mobilization could cripple them. Europe doesn't. Many European countries are dependent on Russian gas. Ukraine certainly doesn't. They would undoubtedly suffer the most casualties and highest economic costs. So why is [Vladimir] Putin sending troops to Russia's border with Ukraine? Why is [Joe] Biden moving troops into Europe under NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] and threatening to impose sanctions on Russia?

Our guest today will be Katrina vanden Heuvel, publisher and an editorial director of the *Nation* magazine and now columnist for the *Washington Post*. In three of her recent columns, “What a Sensible Ukraine Policy Would Look Like,” “Stop the Stumble Toward War with Russia,” and “The Exit From the Ukraine Crisis That's Hiding in Plain Sight”, she lays out the facts of our current Ukraine crisis and makes a case for peace.

And there's a trouble only new trend among America's celebrity billionaires and corporate lobbyists – nuclear power, it's back. Elon Musk and Jack Dorsey are tweeting about it. Bill Gates and Warren Buffett are investing in it. What is wrong with these people? Despite a nuclear facility's toxic byproducts, the abundance of cheaper and cleaner alternative energy sources, and of course the risk of catastrophic meltdown, nuclear advocates are trying to rebrand old, unsafe, ineffective nuclear tech as a clever alternative energy source. What's behind this latest nuclear renaissance?

Our second guest today will be a friend of the show, Peter Bradford. He once served on the US Nuclear Regulatory Commission and he's coming on the program to tell us why nuclear is still a bad idea. As always, somewhere in the middle, we'll check in with our corporate crime reporter, Russell Mokhiber. But first, let's talk about the Ukraine strategy that our first guest refers to as “bluster and a prayer.” David?

**David Feldman:** Katrina vanden Heuvel has been visiting Moscow for 40 years, written a book about [Mikhail] Gorbachev and his reformers. She is also the editorial director and publisher of the *Nation* magazine and writes a weekly column for the *Washington Post*. Welcome to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*, Katrina vanden Heuvel.

**Katrina vanden Heuvel:** Thank you.

**Ralph Nader:** Welcome indeed, Katrina. We have a very serious audience who is quite skeptical of what the Western nations are now doing about Ukraine. And I think they also need to be aware, if they're not, that Napoleon invaded Russia; the German regimes invaded Russia in World War I and World War II, generating maybe 50 million deaths and untold devastation. And then the Western nations led by the United States created a military Alliance confronting the Soviet Union called NATO and also created a huge market for US corporate arms sales. So that's why the dictator Putin can think that he has a good deal of Russian worry behind him. So with that background, what is your take right now on Ukraine?

**Katrina vanden Heuvel:** Thank you, Ralph. You know, it's interesting because we talk a lot about Putin and his authoritarianism, but it's across the establishment, the political establishment, Putin's blob that there is opposition to what you were talking about, which is the North American treaty alliance, NATO. [Boris] Yeltsin's government opposed. Let me give what I think is the original sin as we look out at the very, very dangerous Ukraine crisis, perhaps as dangerous US-Russian confrontation since the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962. In 1990, he and [Ronald] Reagan ended the cold war. And in Germany, when there was German reunification in 1990, Gorbachev was promised by George H.W. Bush and Secretary of State James Baker that NATO would not move "one inch eastward." And if people doubt that, the National Security Archives in Washington has primary documents and has confirmed this, though it hasn't been covered in our newspapers of record.

NATO began to move eastward immediately. In three or four years, it had gobbled up more than 15, 20 countries; it's now 30 countries. And the epicenter of the new cold war is no longer in Berlin. It's on Russia's borders. NATO, as you pointed out, Ralph, is not a coffee klatch. It's not like the AARP. I used to say, it's not like a tea party. You can't say that anymore. This is a military alliance that was designed to counter the Soviet East European military alliance, the Warsaw Pact. When the Soviet Union ended, the Warsaw Pact ended. So the purpose of NATO has always been not clear except to those who are raking in the dollars, because you have to have military equipment compatible with the US and others. It's a big lobby group.

Now, in 1997, when [Bill] Clinton decided to keep expanding, you know, there was a debate in this country, Ralph, you may remember it. George Kennan, an esteemed diplomat, warned Thomas Friedman that this would be the gravest error, continue the Cold War. There was a debate in the Senate. Now Biden didn't vote against, but Senator [Bill] Bradley did. You had hardliners like Paul Nitze and [Edward] Teller opposing NATO expansion, but Clinton moved ahead. Yeltsin was a weak read and acceded to a lot of what Washington wanted.

So we are now here with NATO on Russia's borders. And I think the Russians said, we've been communicating to you for years and years. And the final straw was 2008 when [George H. W.] Bush worked to fast track Ukraine and Georgia. And I think it's the Ukraine piece. I don't wanna allocate blame, but you know, there's blame to go around right now [with] the Russian troops massing. But this is not a new situation, Ralph.

**Ralph Nader:** When you say NATO expansion, this was not a military invasion of Eastern Europe. By expansion they went to Hungary and Poland, Czechoslovakia and others, and signed them up, right?

**Katrina vanden Heuvel:** Here's the thing. People ask why shouldn't Ukraine as a sovereign nation be allowed to join NATO? Well, first of all, because of the territorial fighting in Ukraine. Right now, according to NATO's own charter, Ukraine couldn't join NATO. But NATO is a

military alliance, Ralph. And, you know, in 1990, for a split second, there was an alternative security architecture on offer. George H. W.[and] Baker tamped it down pretty quickly, but someone I greatly admire, Gorbachev, had a vision, which is not unheard of that other institutions in Europe lead the way – not a military one. Because what we've done is militarize relations with Russia, which were already militarized.

And so I think one has to be very aware. NATO, for many people, sounds like a feudal organization. You've talked about this, Ralph. There is a kind of amnesia and a failure to remember history. And I think in that, there was a CNN reporter the other day who called one of our writers, Anatol Lieven, very good writer. And they were talking about the warm water port in Crimea, Sevastopol, and the reporter said, “Which side did the Soviet Union fight on in World War II?” It's kind of like, I understand why we don't get the full range of views, which is needed because there's a history hole here.

**Ralph Nader:** Well, in your *Washington Post* piece, you say, “Is there any way out of the exceedingly dangerous crisis?” I think it's more dangerous than most people have been writing about it. Because when Biden said only one man is gonna decide whether Russia is gonna invade Ukraine and that is Vladimir Putin. Well, the corollary to that is if Putin is humiliated, he may just flip and one man has got his finger on the nuclear trigger. We're playing Russian roulette here.

**Katrina vanden Heuvel:** It is very dangerous. We published a piece by the former head of Physicians for Social Responsibility about the nuclear. You have two nuclear powers involved here. I have to say, though, that this country, it's all Putin, Putin, Putin. Do not forget, I mean, there is a blob in Russia, there are political forces, even if it is an authoritarian country. A major general published a letter in Moscow two days ago, signed on by 15 colonels and generals, protesting Putin's lack of decisiveness. This is very dangerous. We see it in this country. The hawks are ascended. Diplomacy is the only way out, Ralph. And the offer in 2015 was called the Minsk Agreement. And it was agreed to for a brief period; there was a cease fire. The parties attached to it are Ukraine, Russia, France, and Germany. The UN [United Nations] endorsed it. The OSCE [Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe] endorsed it. Samantha Power then at the UN thought it was the best option as did Antony Blinken, the Secretary of State.

What it entails essentially is that the Donbas region and the Eastern part of Ukraine, the Russian speaking region where there are Russian troops or separatists, be given autonomous status within a federated society, language protection, the borders of Ukraine are sovereign, that Ukraine become a non-aligned country, almost like the Finland or Austrian State Treaty in 1955. And I think this provides for sovereign borders, independence, but not in NATO. There is an offer though, this idea, that there'd be a moratorium on NATO expansion, maybe in 15 years. And what's interesting about this, Ralph, I'll say just briefly, is that you do have three new leaders involved. Because when it last came up, it was [François] Hollande in France, [Angela] Merkel in Germany, and the chocolate oligarch, [Petro] Poroshenko in Ukraine. You do have a new leader in Ukraine, [Volodymyr] Zelensky, who at one point last week said enough with all this hot talk in Washington; it's hurting the Ukrainian economy. You have [Emmanuel] Macron who is on his way out as French president, who's channeling his own [Charles] de Gaulle. And the new government in Germany, I think, is hopeful in terms of not being corrupt the way so many in this country say is because of the pipeline. That is a factor, but they've done business with Russia and they've had relations with Russia as a European power that are different than ours. So I think this agreement, the Minsk Agreement, the parties who had met in Paris two weeks ago,

are meeting in Berlin this coming week; it's a possibility, but it needs space and it needs patience. And I think that is lack of supply in our political culture.

**Ralph Nader:** And why did it fall apart after 2015?

**Katrina vanden Heuvel:** It fell apart partly because there was a disagreement about what would happen first. Would the Russian separatists leave before the Ukrainian Kiev troops in that part of Ukraine, that region, leave? And then there was a disagreement about simple things but important like language protection. Because this is a Russian speaking part of Ukraine, Ralph. And one of the first things the new Kiev government did in 2014 was begin to impose language restrictions, that you couldn't study in Russian, or those kinds of things, which are very unsettling for people. But it did not last long, which is a problem, but it is back on offer. It is more of a crisis moment. So I think there are possibilities if there's a will and a persistence.

**Ralph Nader:** Well, there are other factors involved. Biden doesn't wanna appear weak. Putin doesn't wanna appear that he has to back down and be humiliated in front of the Russian people. And Biden wants to send a signal to China about not invading Taiwan. So there are a lot of other things going on. This reminds me of how World War I started with the assassination of Archduke in Sarajevo and Serbia. And then it went like lightning through a bunch of egos who all knew each other – the Czar, the Kaiser in Germany, France, England. They all knew each other. They had intermarriage with each other's families. But they had their egos involved. And, you know, 25 million people were killed in World War I.

**Katrina vanden Heuvel:** But you know, Ralph, it's so true. It is more reminiscent. I'm glad you brought up World War I or not. But there's often this misguided historical analogy to Munich, right? Diplomacy is appeasement. In fact, this is much more reminiscent of World War I, which is kind of the sleepwalking into war. And the war in Ukraine is in the trenches for now. I mean, it could escalate to tactical nuclear weapons, but it is trenches. It's similar to World War I. And people know each other, the intermarriage between Russia and Ukraine and the family relationships is why it's so deeply asymmetrical. The United States has no vital – not to be callous, but no vital national security interest in Ukraine. What we do need to remember is 15,000 civilians have already perished in the fighting. What I'm really worried about, Ralph, is not so much the sending of US and NATO troops to Eastern European countries ringing Ukraine, but we've already sent \$3 billion worth of weapons into Ukraine in the last years. And there are at least a few thousand US advisors there to assist Ukrainians now with this equipment. And what if some, US soldiers are killed on the battlefield, the escalation –

**Ralph Nader:** That's right. That's part of the rumble to war. Then it becomes support to troops. Shut up, Americans, and keep shopping, which is what George W. Bush told us when he and [Dick] Cheney engaged in the criminal war and destruction of Iraq in 2003. I wanna quote a sentence from your article in the *Washington Post*. You say, “Minsk II is a compromise. As such, it requires hard choices on all sides. Ideally, the agreement would be accompanied by a treaty between Russian and United States and Europe guaranteeing neutrality for Ukraine similar to the enforced neutrality of Austria since the cold war’s early years.” And that raises a question we got from one of our listeners recently, who asked, “Why can't NATO declare Ukraine a neutral buffer zone?” It seems maybe that could be a compromise for all three parties involved.

**Katrina vanden Heuvel:** That is a very interesting question because I do think Ukraine's role, if it could be a stable, peaceful, and prosperous country, would be as a bridge between east and west. There's a history here that the protest in Ukraine 2013 began when the EU [European

Union] had on offer to the then president an economic agreement. Putin had put in that why not Ukraine as a member of both the European association involved with Russia, but also the EU, a kind of tripartite. That was rejected by EU, by the then president.

That or the moratorium on NATO expansion vis-à-vis Ukraine. But I'm serious about the fact that there is a NATO charter, as you well know, Ralph, that Article V is that members would come to the defense of a NATO member under attack. But it's also the fact that you need to be territorially whole, which Ukraine is not now, to join.

**Ralph Nader:** That NATO provision is subject to the US Constitution. And if the Congress declares war, that NATO provision is inoperative. Congress here is like an inkblot. They're watching Biden threaten the harshest sanctions ever imposed by the United States on Russia and all the terrible impacts on the Russian people. Well, that happens to be illegal under international law, Katrina. You can't impose sanctions on the country with a disproportionate impact on the civilian population. And the civilian population would take the lion's share of the brunt here. It wouldn't be Putin and his entourage. And there's no one saying to Biden, Hey, do you understand international law? Do you understand treaties? Do you understand Geneva conventions, which we're a signatory to?" It's the same kind of a runaway rumble to war without knowing what the consequences are. It's as if they just want to humiliate Putin.

**Katrina vanden Heuvel:** So the [Congressional] Progressive Caucus is thinking hard about sanctions. It's maybe late, but sanctions are an act of war in many ways and counterproductive. They've been both illegal, counterproductive and lead to humanitarian catastrophe in most parts. But there's also another side of sanctions. It is a race to the bottom. You're right. In the Congress and the Senate right now, between Democrats, who just wanna wait if the war begins before sanctioning, and the Republicans, who are gung ho to start now, there is discussion about the authority to use military force and using the Constitution's war powers, because this is illegal in the sense of sending American men and women, even as special advisors. But sanctions play in different ways, Ralph, I mean, inside Russia, I've seen this. It has brought people together and made them more anti-American. It has strengthened Putin in some ways, because they have a \$650 billion reserve. They've started producing things they didn't. And so it's counterproductive. I agree with you that they try to target Putin or his associates, but that's very tough. Very tough.

**Ralph Nader:** Well, the *New York Times* today reports that it's likely to be a long delayed standoff between the Western countries, US and Russia. What does that mean?

**Katrina vanden Heuvel:** Well, it could be a game of bluff. I mean, I continue to think the more time that elapses, the more possibility for diplomacy and the more possibility for face-saving maneuvers. I mean, I think the fact – I was gonna say, Thom Friedman, who is a barometer for not much, but he gave an interview the other day where he believes that the Finland, Austria nonaligned proposal is a good one.

I think people are looking out and seeing – first of all, I think it's not a bad thing because I think we should not be a unipolar world. But you got China and Russia coming closer in different ways. They will continue to compete, but our policies are pushing them closer. Certainly, the National Security Strategy, Ralph, which came out about a year ago, right? It named Russia and China as our challenges, enemies. We are in a new world. We haven't even talked pandemic, Ralph. Think of the money that's being squandered. And famous bipartisanship in Washington, you think about this all the time, is betrayed through votes on this defense budget, which they added 25% to or something. Anyway...

**Ralph Nader:** With Democrats supporting it, they added \$24 billion to the bloated, wasteful military budget--more than Biden and the Pentagon asked for. This is totally reckless.

**Katrina vanden Heuvel:** It's totally reckless.

**Ralph Nader:** Reckless behavior.

**Katrina vanden Heuvel:** And for people who think it's a jobs program, you could use that money in far more effective, productive ways, because it has been a jobs program. And you heard about this shareholder call with the big four defense companies. You know, they're salivating. And NATO, by the way, is part of that. But I think that you got the pandemic, you have climate crisis, you have global inequality, you have issues which need to be addressed, I will say, in this country, Ralph, the demonization, I have no grief for Putin. I've worked in Russia with women's groups, independent media. I've seen the suppression/repression of groups like Memorial. But what's happened is it's all Putin all the time. And we fail to understand that it's a country, where you can't understand Russia right now without understanding the ascendants of the Russian Orthodox Church or the fact that 40% of Putin's edicts are not fulfilled. It's Putin, but it's also a country which has a lot of forces in it. The demonization of Putin is not a policy. It's an alibi for a policy. And it has also led to the ability to think about war. If you demonize something or someone or a country, it's easier to see why one would go to war. So I simply suggest we should understand that cold wars are not good for any progressives, any people who believe in the rule of law, because the space for dissent, for reimagining a different kind of foreign policy closes down in militarization.

**Ralph Nader:** Well, you have in your article a little light at the end of the tunnel here, when you say – it just came out a few days ago, listeners. You say, “In Paris last week, seven years after the Minsk II agreement, Ukraine and Russia held marathon eight-hour talks mediated by Germany and France. A new round of Minsk talks will be held in Berlin in the second week of February. “As we confront the worst US-Russian confrontation in decades, isn't it time for the United States to join with its allies to revive a path to a settlement that might lead to a stable peace.” What do you think now of these talks?

**Katrina vanden Heuvel:** I don't think anything very specific will come out of these talks in Berlin. The hope is that they continue in short order. Not delayed, delayed, delayed. But I do think there should be thought given to continuing the nuclear security process. And, you know, it's not sexy, but a new security architecture in Europe could be on the agenda. Because Gorbachev in 1987 gave one of the most remarkable speeches at the UN, talking about a common European home from Vladivostok in the east of Russia to Lisbon. And, you know, that's not farfetched, if there was a different – less militarized. Because NATO has militarized it. And again, I come back to that's not the way to move forward right now. But I do take hope that talks continue, and people know that this could be one of the great cataclysmic, catastrophic military actions. So the hope is no accidental shooting, no stumble into war and no hotheads,

**Ralph Nader:** There's none of that caution in the Biden regime. They've just sent several thousand US soldiers to various countries, Romania, Poland.

**Katrina vanden Heuvel:** I know.

**Ralph Nader:** They've got an Air Force squadron in Estonia. They're not letting Putin save face if he decides to back off because he's gonna lose a lot if he invades Ukraine. What kind of nonsense diplomacy is this when you don't show the adversary a way out?

**Katrina vanden Heuvel:** I think there may be talks to find a way for Putin to climb down. And I think there is a mixed – there's not a great balance, but they keep talking deterrence and diplomacy. They don't stop talking diplomacy, but the balance between deterrence and diplomacy does seem off. But there's an element of showing power with these troops. As I said, Ralph, I'm more worried about the weapons going into Ukraine and the special ops. I think the troops around ringing are kind of a show of power to get Putin to take seriously the diplomacy.

But it is the case that this is not an administration... this is an administration that has been very – I would use the word – aggressive toward Ukraine. That was Biden's project, by the way, in the [Barack] Obama White House. He was considered the proconsul to Ukraine. We gotta have some new thinking about how to ensure that Ukraine become a sovereign, prosperous, stable country. And it's not gonna be through a war where they are conscripting or seeking troops up to 57 years old for men and there was a story about women fighting up to 60. That's inhumane in addition to the failure of military responses.

**Ralph Nader:** Well, if the shoe was on the other foot, you always have to do that in foreign policy.

**Katrina vanden Heuvel:** Absolutely.

**Ralph Nader:** If we were invaded from the north in two wars and 50 million Americans were killed and there was a hostile power north and it surrounded us with a military alliance and it put soldiers in Cuba and Nicaragua, what do you think we would do? I mean...

**Katrina vanden Heuvel:** We would shout to the rooftop and what have we done, Ralph? You can see it. The Monroe Doctrine, the way we've policed our neighborhood over years is from Allan Nairn...

**Ralph Nader:** Yeah. We're about to blow up the world on the Cuban missiles crisis.

**Katrina vanden Heuvel:** And look at how we're handling Cuba now. We're decimating a small country for reasons not fully clear at all, and we're treating it like our backyard. And, I think what if you had Russian troops on the Canadian border or Russian troops in Mexico, that has been kind of put out there, there is an expression of strategic empathy. Putting yourself in the other's shoes is not condoning, it's understanding. But I think there's been a degradation of diplomacy, Ralph, because it's viewed too often as appeasement and that is a very dangerous equivalence.

**Ralph Nader:** Empires know how to wage wars. They don't know how to wage peace. Proposals by then Congressman Dennis Kucinich, and before he was a Congressman Jim McGovern to have a Department of Peace to countervail this kind of rush to reckless increase in the risk of war. I wanna leave our listeners with this suggestion. Obama was gonna go into Syria. He thought that was a little bit of a stretch. So he said, "I want to go to Congress to get authority." When that was publicized, millions of emails came in from left, right, conservative, liberal to their members of Congress saying, "Don't you dare." I think it was 98-2 in terms of the predominant opposition. And I think, listeners, do your part, get to your senators and representatives and tell them, assert the constitutional authority of Congress, which is supreme over NATO's treaty, and which is much more likely to result in public hearings and a larger perspective on what's going on here before it's too late. Thank you very much, Katrina.

**Katrina vanden Heuvel:** Thank you, Ralph.

**Steve Skrovan:** We've been speaking with Katrina vanden Heuvel. We will link to her work at [ralphnaderradiohour.com](http://ralphnaderradiohour.com). 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, February 11, 2022; I'm Russell Mokhiber. The growing casino industry in the United States is built on a model of profitability that bears very close resemblance to two other industries: the tobacco industry and the opioid pain medication industry. That's according to a report released last week by Mark Gottlieb, Richard Daynard, and Lissy Friedman and published in the *University of Illinois Law Review*. While it is rather obvious that all three industries have demonstrated the ability to be consistently profitable, the models used to achieve that profitability are remarkably similar, they write. All three industries began with addictive products. Through investments in research and development, they continually refined their product designs to emphasize and amplify addiction as a design element in order to increase profits. For the *Corporate Crime Reporter*, I'm Russell Mokhiber.

**Steve Skrovan:** Thank you, Russell. Welcome back to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*. My name is Steve Skrovan along with David Feldman and Ralph. Out here in California, PG&E can't keep their power lines from starting wildfires, can't keep their gas pipelines from exploding, and lied in order to build a nuclear facility near several active fault lines. Why would we give them more nuclear power plants? David?

**David Feldman:** Peter Bradford is a former member of the United States Nuclear Regulatory Commission and Vice-Chair of the board of the Union of Concerned Scientists. Welcome back to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*, Peter Bradford.

**Peter Bradford:** Good to be with you again.

**Ralph Nader:** Welcome again, Peter. I think people know that nuclear power has been around a long time in the United States. What is the proportion of electricity from these nuclear power plants and how many of them are left? Some of them have been shut down.

**Peter Bradford:** Yeah. Nuclear power generates a little under 20% of the electricity consumed in the US now. In the last six years or so, 11 of the 104 plants that were operating a decade ago have been shut down primarily for economic reasons. Either they are just too expensive to operate in power markets, or as in the case of San Onofre in California, they have something go wrong and the cost of fixing it is far more than the value of the power that it would produce. So fewer plants, some have increased their output somewhat, and that's kept the overall percentage in the 19 to 20 range for the last decade or more. The big story, though, is that new, renewable sources have met all of the growth that's occurred on the grid and done a lot to displace coal and other carbon-emitting power as well. New nuclear has made no contribution to that because there hasn't been a new plant brought online in a century.

**Ralph Nader:** And of course the only ones that are really under construction after the boondoggle construction situation in Florida, where they stopped building them because they were so horrifically costly to the taxpayers, never mind the rate payers in Georgia. Could you describe the situation in Georgia? A classic example of government guaranteed corporate capitalism, which reverberates for the whole industry. Without government guarantees, government subsidies, government limited liability for these nuclear plants under the Price-Anderson [Nuclear Industries Indemnity] Act, we wouldn't have nuclear plants. So could you describe the boondoggle in Georgia?



**Peter Bradford:** Well, Georgia like South Carolina and Florida, enacted laws in 2006 and '07 that basically permitted the utilities to start charging the customers for nuclear plants the day they started building them. And that transferred, as you say, a bunch of the risks--the financial risks, the risks of cancellation--from investors to customers. And that's the only way you can finance these things because sophisticated investors won't take those risks. They insist on shifting them either to taxpayers or customers.

In South Carolina and in Florida, the plants were canceled, leaving the customers in Florida's case holding a billion dollar bag and in south Carolina's holding a \$9 billion bag. But in Georgia, they've slogged on, and two plants that were supposed to come online in 2016 at a cost of about \$14 billion. And even that was considerably more expensive than getting equally carbon-free power from other sources. But those two plants, far from coming online in 2016, at a cost of \$14 billion are still not finished. And they're now projected to cost something closer to \$30 billion and the amount keeps going up; every six months to a year they revise the amount upward again. So we don't know the end of that story, but what it has meant is that new nuclear power hasn't displaced a molecule of carbon in the US in the 21st century ever since Dick Cheney announced the nuclear renaissance in 2001.

**Ralph Nader:** Well, it's even worse than what you say because the cost overruns in the Georgia plant are coming from the taxpayer and the Congress just appropriates this money; there is hardly any dissent. Republicans, Democrats, they're all for nuclear power, all for guaranteeing these huge cost overruns that never seem to end. Can you explain the Congress here? Even senators like [Bernie] Sanders and [Elizabeth] Warren don't seem to be outspoken. Senator [Ed] Markey is the most outspoken and he's more subdued than I've seen him in years on this issue.

**Peter Bradford:** Yeah. You know, it really is hard to explain and you put your finger on what, to me, is the most interesting question that both we and historians are likely to be asking about nuclear power, which is how on earth in the face of its unbroken 40-year history of economic fiasco and failure, how on earth well-intentioned congresspersons, columnists and investors keep falling in line and thumping the tubs in its favor. It can't all be campaign contributions. There's kind of a collective buy-in, an unquestioning acceptance of conventional wisdom as to nuclear. We've seen it before in other areas. The Vietnam War was popular for some years before it wasn't and the same kind of all the wise people backing it. But what's breathtaking about nuclear power is that the evidence really is in. In the regions of the country that run honest power market auctions, where energy efficiency and renewables load management, storage now using batteries, can combine and bid against both new nuclear and even against the operating plants where the money has already been spent. It's those alternatives that win. That's why the 10 or so nuclear plants that have closed, have closed. The industry's myth is that somehow they're unfairly handicapped because they don't get the subsidies that others get. But in fact, they get more subsidies than anyone else gets. The old myth about environmentalists turning out and blocking the gates; that's gone. And none of the plants that have closed in recent years have been closed by environmental opposition. They've all failed economically. And yet as you say, the Congresspeople just won't see the evidence that couldn't be any plainer and can easily be put right in front of them.

**Ralph Nader:** I have an idea what's going on, put it in front of you. And it comes from my conversation some years ago with Senator Markey. They had an energy bill in 2009 when the Democrats controlled the Congress after the Obama win in the House and it passed and it was very good for forests, equatorial forests. It was very good for renewables. It was very good for

efficiency programs. But it had a nuclear program inside it, billions of dollars. So, I said to Senator Markey, "What's up here?" He said, "Well, anytime we put forth renewables, the Republicans and their Democratic allies say, 'you gotta fourth nuclear,' it's a package deal." And so to get through the renewables, they had to accept the nuclear. The bill failed in the Senate. It never was voted on and it didn't go anywhere, but it reflected Barack Obama's all of the above. When he was asked all these energy choices you have, which ones should we go? And he said all of the above. So that's what's going on on Capitol Hill. The nuclear power lobbyists are all over the place. They're corporate socialists to the core. They know that Wall Street won't invest a penny, as you indicated, without government guarantees [and] subsidies. And even the old nuclear plants, when they are renovated and given an extended license like in upstate New York, they get subsidized for that as well. So I think that's the reason. They've got it locked into some kind of trade off. Well, now, when the pro nukes can't answer the arguments that our listeners have just heard, they say, well, we have new models; they're gonna be smaller; they're gonna produce less radioactive waste, which is deadly for tens of thousands of years and we still don't have a repository in the US for all the waste that's piling up outside these nuclear plants. And by the way, the Indian Point plants that are being closed, just about closed down, they're only 30 miles north of Manhattan and they're not that far from an earthquake fault, listeners. So, this is very serious here in terms of a meltdown potential, where you got all the millions of people who would be exposed to radioactive cloud if something went wrong with these plants, but they're gonna shut them down. What do you think of the new model approach to keep the nuclear energy hope alive?

**Peter Bradford:** Well, just to footnote, the Indian Point plants are in fact shut down. Last one closed last year. So that concern is over now, except for the spent fuel that someday has to be removed. The interest in small reactors or advanced reactors really isn't new. I mean, this is an industry with the history of economic failure. And every time the current technology goes up on the rocks, somebody rushes forward with proposals to build better. I mean, the current wave of nuclear renaissance reactors that came along in 2007, '08 and '09, they were all supposed to be modular. They weren't small, but they were an advanced technology, it was said, with a new regulatory system and it was all gonna be cheaper and faster and more predictable.

And of those 31 plants, as you've already observed, 29 have been either canceled or indefinitely deferred. The only one slogging on are those two in Georgia with big overruns and long delays. So there's nothing in that history to give anyone any faith at all that the small designs are gonna do better. The industry's argument for 50 years has been we have to get bigger. We've gotta spread these costs over more and more kilowatt-hours. So the idea that suddenly the way to get cheaper is they were wrong all along and now we have to get smaller is open to question from the outset. But more importantly, if you believe as I do and I'm sure you do, that climate change is an urgent situation requiring a rapid and urgent response, there's no way even following the industry's calendar, which is not a wise thing to do, that there are gonna be any small modular reactors available in the next eight or nine years. And there isn't gonna be a large fleet of them available for a lot longer than that and that's if everything goes well. And there are none that have been built, none that have been proven, none that have been shown to be cost effective. So betting a big chunk of our climate change strategy on what's essentially fantasy land is a pretty dubious proposition. And the all of the above strategy that's used to justify this, it's ridiculous to call it a strategy. We don't do all of the above with regard to other serious problems. We don't use caviar to fight world hunger, and for good reason, it's too expensive. You can't buy enough of the nourishment that you need if you start spending your money on the most expensive

sources. And that's really what the all of the above, let's back nuclear to the hilt approach to solving climate change would mean.

We can get a lot more carbon removal a lot more quickly out of strategies that combine efficiency, renewables, load management and storage, and those take care of the alleged problems of the wind not blowing and the sun not shining because they match those technologies up with other techniques like load management, such that you got what you need when you need it. The areas that have gone to that, the countries that have gone to that, are doing just fine and they're doing it a lot more cheaply than those that are relying on new nuclear.

**Ralph Nader:** The next proposal we're hearing, Peter, is the resurrection of this boondoggle that started in the 1950s and '60s with contracts at Princeton University by the federal government, nuclear fusion. And the *New York Times* has now had several articles on an entrepreneur in the United Kingdom who claims he has raised a lot of money to experiment with a nuclear fusion reactor. Could you explain what nuclear fusion is and why after all these decades it has never registered anything in terms of economical electricity even in the experimental stage?

**Peter Bradford:** Well, I'm sure the physicists in your audience will cringe at my unsophisticated description, but fusion is essentially the forcing together of two light atoms. Fission, which is the energy source in conventional nuclear power plants, is the splitting apart of heavy atoms. And the challenge with fusion has always been to contain the process by which the light atoms are forced together. It's the source of energy in the sun and there's put into a lot of energy there, but it's very, very, very difficult and expensive to contain. And no one has been able to do it yet. It has some nuclear waste challenges of its own. My understanding is that they're not as serious as those that go with nuclear fission, but the basic problem with sort of throwing once hats in the air, and saying, here's an answer to climate change, is that we don't know how to do it. The whole time I've been involved with nuclear energy, which is 50 years now, fusion has always been 30 years in the future and it still is. And it probably still will be 10 or 20 years from now. But even if it isn't, you just can't bet the ranch until terms of climate change on a technology that you don't know how to use and on the basis of a promise of a few enthusiastic people who made a lot of money in other fields that this time they're gonna get it right.

**Ralph Nader:** It's like a corporate welfare plaything for the super rich. And by that, I mean, the federal government has just appropriated some money for the latest round of fusion debacle in some of the Biden legislation. As one scientist quipped to me once, he said the best fusion reactor is the sun that's gonna be around for 4 billion years and it doesn't require a subsidy. Fusion is pie in the sky. And climate crisis is now. That's why retrofitting buildings, more efficient use of electricity, renewable energy has a time immediacy that nuclear power plants and new models and nuclear fusion can't come close to. Nuclear power plants, how long do they take to build?

**Peter Bradford:** Nuclear power plants today? In China, they say they're doing them in five or six years. In our case in Georgia, we're coming close to entering the third decade. And the same is true in France, and as you noted, in Finland. So they take a long time. Admiral [Hyman] Rickover, the father of the US Nuclear Navy, is said to have commented back in the 1950s, that it's a lot easier to make money on paper reactors than on real ones. And what I take that he meant by that is that you can get a lot of government support for reactor designs if you wave them in front of enough gullible legislators and you can make money that way. But when it comes to actually building them and producing electricity, that's much more of a challenge. Not many people have done it and none have done it with regard to fusion. There are folks promoting small

modular reactors, to some extent fusion, are doing all right on the subsidies that they're attracting to go ahead and put the designs together and do the preparatory work. But the real test doesn't come until you have something that you're trying to commercialize and that's years in the future and many taxpayer dollars in the future.

**Ralph Nader:** Well, you were head of the New York Public Utility Commission [Public Service Commission] among your many appointments, not just a commissioner in the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, what do you think the State Utility Commission's role is here in the context of our discussion?

**Peter Bradford:** Well, if I were still in that position, I'd be insisting on competitive tests every time the nuclear industry showed up saying that it needed more subsidies to either build a reactor or to continue the operation of an old one that was troubling. By that, I mean, I'd say run an auction, an auction in which renewables, efficiency, and storage can compete on equal terms with the nuclear proposal you're making, and show us that there is an economic justification for this. And I don't think they could ever do it. I know they can't do it with regard to new reactors. It wouldn't even be close because they're costing two or three times at least what other sources are already bidding in auctions out west. But I don't even think they can show it with regard to the operating reactors that they're closing down. And instead, what's happening is that these somewhat gullible state legislatures, and now the Congress too, are putting up money for nuclear rather than through any kind of competitive process. They're just taking nuclear power's word for the fact that they've got the only way to resolve climate change. And so they're sticking it to the customers, in some cases to the taxpayers, to keep plants going when it would be cheaper to replace them and use the savings to build more of other clean energy sources.

**Ralph Nader:** As Amory Lovins, who we both know, an early advocate of soft energy, otherwise known as efficiency and renewability, keeps saying, anytime you hear people say, we need to build more nuclear reactors and it's gonna cost this much, ask them how much faster can they get safe, clean energy on the ground if they use the same amount of money designed for nuclear plant construction for renewable energy and energy efficiency, which gives jobs to people in communities all over the country, like retrofitting buildings. Are any other countries doing it better? We're talking with Peter Bradford, former commissioner in Nuclear Regulatory Commission, former head of the New York Public Utility Commission. Anybody doing it better – Germany, Sweden, Canada, other countries?

**Peter Bradford:** Well, you don't have to go overseas. I mean, for example, California has a plan now to phase out its last two nuclear plants at Diablo Canyon and replace them with renewables. New York says that that's what's going to happen at the Indian Point site, even as it subsidizes a continued operation of the upstate plants. So one of the virtues of the US system of course, is we do have 50 states and a lot of different policies being followed. You can find it here. Germany is the country that made a decision back around 2000 to shut down its nuclear plants. Then it paused that decision briefly. And then it took it up again after Fukushima. And they'll close the last of their nuclear plants down during this calendar year. And they have meanwhile put into place a massive program of renewables and efficiency to make up for not only the coal plants that they've been closing, but also the nuclear plants that they are closing. And they have not had significant power shortages. The argument that some make is that they could have closed more coal if they'd kept the nuclear open, but that's not really so clear. In many ways, it's the closing of the nuclear plants that made the extra space in their system for the very substantial, renewable push that they've made. I think when we look back on this history in another 15 years, Germany

and California are going to be seen to have been the leaders in effective energy policy and energy resource choice and the rest of us ...

**Ralph Nader:** To be sure, in California, when I started challenging nuclear power in the early 70s, the Atomic Energy Commission was planning a hundred nuclear plants in California, up and down the coast. Can you imagine the madness of this kind of disregard for technological sanity, never mind just economic sanity? As you say, California is gonna be nuclear free very shortly; not trying to deal with a hundred plants and all the waste problems and risks and earthquakes. Peter, what do you think the future scenario is here? I'm sure some of our listeners who are quite aware of the problems of nuclear power feel powerless. They feel frustrated. What do you see in the next 10, 15 years in terms of any efforts to do something, not just against new nuclear reactors, but all the contamination of the nuclear reactor sites operating and decommissioned? What do you think has to be done here?

**Peter Bradford:** You're testing my forecasting abilities well beyond their limit, but here it goes. I think nuclear is gonna fail again. And that the serious question is just how expensively it'll fail and how much it will distract attention from the measures that it really need to be taken. In the end, the industry may succeed in getting enough money out of the government or out of its customers to build a handful of small modular reactors. But that's what happened with these plants in Georgia as part of the nuclear renaissance. They're gonna wind up demonstrating the opposite of what the industry said that they would demonstrate. Instead of being quick and cheap and clean, they'll be expensive and problematic and hard to operate.

So we'll reach a point where nuclear power will not be a resource to which government will devote time and money anymore, but it's gonna take longer and cost more than it should. The waste process, we're starting all over again after – what is it now – 40 years of thinking that we were going to drill a hole in a mountain out west somewhere and take it all there. The government has just announced a so-called consent based process in which they're going to find geologically suitable communities who would volunteer to take it. But until that happens, and I wouldn't hold my breath, it's staying right where it is – on the sites of the power plants that created it, even though the residents of those towns were never told that they were gonna be a waste storage site long past the time when their nuclear power closed.

The decommissioning that you asked about is going more smoothly. Most of the plants that have been decommissioned have been decommissioned within the amounts that were set aside to do the job. But the fly in that ointment is that the decommissioning hasn't included removing the waste. And so the issue that remains is how much use the communities can make of the site for other purposes.

**Ralph Nader:** We've been talking with Peter Bradford, former commissioner of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, former head of the New York Public Utility Commission among other appointments. Peter, before we conclude, what's the best information website that you can tell our listeners to access?

**Peter Bradford:** Oh, far and away, the best site on nuclear energy in the US and around the world is the World Nuclear Industry Status Report. And you can google it under that name. It's published annually and it contains an update on the nuclear power programs and leading nuclear economic and construction and safety issues in all of the leading countries with nuclear programs. The editor in chief is a guy named Michael Schneider and he has done a wonderful job for a long time.

**Ralph Nader:** And how about the best website criticizing nuclear power?

**Peter Bradford:** The status report is pretty critical, but in the US, NIRS, the Nuclear Information and Resource Service, as it maintains a very good and very skeptical website. Tim Judson runs that and is as knowledgeable as anyone in the country.

**Ralph Nader:** Well, in conclusion, we've had another discussion, listeners, on nuclear power, which is unneeded, unsafe, uninsurable, uneconomic, unaccountable, and it's still around. This is a testimony to the corporate state, what happens when big business and big government merge and are not held accountable under an open society. Thank you very much, Peter.

**Peter Bradford:** Thank you, Ralph. It's good to talk with you again.

**Steve Skrovan:** We've been speaking with Peter Bradford. We will link to his work at [ralphnaderradiohour.com](http://ralphnaderradiohour.com). I wanna thank our guests again, Katrina vanden Heuvel and Peter Bradford. For those of you listening on the radio, that's our show. For you, podcast listeners, stay tuned for some bonus material we call "The Wrap Up". A transcript of this program 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. And for Ralph's weekly column, you can get it for free by going to [nader.org](http://nader.org). For more from Russell Mokhiber, go to [corporatecrimereporter.com](http://corporatecrimereporter.com).

**Steve Skrovan:** The American Museum of Tort Law has gone virtual. Go to [tortmuseum.org](http://tortmuseum.org) to explore the exhibits, take a virtual tour, and learn about iconic tort cases from history. And be sure to check out their latest program on how advocates are going to court to confront the climate crisis. All that and more at [tortmuseum.org](http://tortmuseum.org).

**David Feldman:** Ralph wants you to join the Congress Club. To get more information, go to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour* website, and in the top right margin, click on the button labeled Congress Club. We've also added a button right below that with specific instructions about what to include in your letters to Congress. 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 proof reader is Elisabeth Solomon. Our associate producer is Hannah Feldman. Our social media manager is Steven Wendt.

**David Feldman:** Join us next week on the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*. Thank you, Ralph.

**Ralph Nader:** Thank you, everybody. Go to Veterans for Peace website, listeners. You don't have to be a veteran to participate, but you'll see what they're doing around the country and with their various chapters. Thank you.