

## RALPH NADER RADIO HOUR EP 444 TRANSCRIPT

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

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

**David Feldman:** Hello, Steve.

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

**Ralph Nader:** Hi, everybody.

**Steve Skrovan:** And before we get to our featured guest, we want to cover just a couple of topics very briefly. One is, Ralph, the new issue of the *Capitol Hill Citizen* has come out and it was covered in *Politico*. Tell us about that.

**Ralph Nader:** Yeah. It's a third pilot issue of the *Capitol Hill Citizen*. It's really caught on, Steve. It really is amazing. People want a newspaper on Congress as if people matter first and not just official source journalism by the members. And it's really caught on. If you want to get a copy, you can send \$5 or more, if you wish, to [capitolhillcitizen.com](http://capitolhillcitizen.com) and you'll get it by first-class mail and let's have your reaction to it. This issue is 40 pages packed with material that you may not have read about.

**Steve Skrovan:** And let us know how they get that, Ralph.

**Ralph Nader:** You can go to [capitolhillcitizen.com](http://capitolhillcitizen.com). They'll show you how you can send \$5 or more to get a first-class dispatch of the *Capitol Hill Citizen* pilot September edition.

**Steve Skrovan:** Very good. So be sure to do that. And also, let's put in a little plug for Claire Nader's book, *You Are Your Own Best Teacher*. How's that going?

**Ralph Nader:** Well, the press is full of the damage that the internet is doing to kids. Federal Trade Commission is looking into it. California State Senate passed a restriction, 32/ nothing-- the entire Senate 32 nothing recently. Claire has been very concerned about tapping into the innate idealism, intellect, practicality of kids nine to 12 years old. So she directly speaks to them on 60 different topics to provoke their imagination, their sense of themselves, their self-confidence, and their intellectual liberation. And we need the moral authority of these children. We don't have many reservoirs of moral authority. And we know when these children talk to adults, whether it's personal, to stop smoking cigarettes or wear their seatbelt, or whether it's like Greta Thunberg on climate disruption; the moral authority really reaches adults. And we need to make sure that these kids are not sucked into six, seven hours a day into the internet gulag and addicted to it and under the control of Facebook and Instagram who are just merciless electronic child molesters.

Her book entitled *You Are Your Own Best Teacher* was written up in *Politico* recently and we got a terrific response by its readers from around the world, I might add. So if you want to partake in this new, fascinating phenomena here of paying attention with family conversations to these youngsters and expecting more of them, they'll surprise you. You expect less, they'll oblige you. We can't deliver another generation of our children, to the abduction by these corporations, into the internet, and now deeper into what's called the metaverse. The planet is running out of

time. And Claire wrote this book directly for parents and tweens. You can get her book by going to [inspiringtweens.com](http://inspiringtweens.com).

**Steve Skrovan:** Thank you for that, Ralph. Now it's time for our featured guest. You know, we're no great defenders of either majority political party. The duopoly that has taken over our political system favors powerful interests, powerful people while suppressing third-party participation and it disenfranchises marginalized groups. But we can't in good faith compare the Democratic and Republican parties as equals. That would be like comparing apples to orange scented sewage.

Our featured guest today will be political columnist, Dana Milbank, whose new book, *The Destructionists*, trace our government's greatest failures of the last quarter century—the coup attempt on January 6th, government shutdowns, the great recession, climate inaction, COVID[-19] inaction, our illegal war in Iraq, our illegal war in Afghanistan, and much, much more—to the Republicans who took over their party, ripped out its guts then set their sights on the rest of American democracy. As always, somewhere in there, we'll check in with our corporate crime reporter, Russell Mokhiber. But first, it looks like former Republican Speaker, Newt Gingrich's Contract for America in 1994 was really a contract on America after all. David?

**David Feldman:** Dana Milbank is a political columnist for the *Washington Post* whose work is syndicated nationally. He has also been a contributor to CNN and MSNBC and is the author of the books, *Homo Politicus*, *Tears of a Clown*, and *O Is for Obama*. His latest book is *The Destructionists: The Twenty-Five Year Crack-Up of the Republican Party*. Welcome to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*, Dana Milbank.

**Dana Milbank:** It is an honor to be with you.

**Ralph Nader:** Welcome indeed, Dana. And you know, I'm one of the readers of your *Washington Post* column, where I've labeled you as the great aggregator of facts in a period when people have trouble keeping the torrent of facts and fakes in mind. You total them up again and again.

**Dana Milbank:** Well, I think that's good. It's better than being a creator of facts.

**Ralph Nader:** That's true. Listeners, this is an extremely rare book. You should read it, buy it for your local library, start discussion about it, because although Mark Green and I wrote two books on [Donald] Trump in 2019 and 2020, this book covers the mass Republican drive to take over our politics and smash our democracy in favor of a kind of neofascism. So having said that, I went through this whole book, Dana, and it's a documentation of the lies, falsehoods, slanderous accusations of how the Republicans lied us into the Iraq war; for example, how they cooked the books, and it's just relentless. And we're gonna go in some of the chapters shortly. But one thing that was missing was any rebuttal by the Democrats, by the people accused. And that's because the Democrats are very bad at rebuttals and they're very bad at slogans, nicknames. The mass media, including your *Washington Post* would repeat in 2016 verbatim the slanderous epithets that Donald Trump hurled against his opponents, Republican and Democrat alike. They would even put the caps in his tweets in the repetition, but they never asked the accused to rebut, an unfair practice in journalism. So why do you think your book didn't have the rebuttals? Is it because there really weren't many rebuttals or is it because the overwhelming focus of your book was on accusations?

**Dana Milbank:** Yeah, I mean, Ralph, the book was about the Republicans and what they've done over the quarter century since Gingrich's Republican Revolution of '94 as opposed to the

reaction to it. But I think you make a good point about the Democrats and their unwillingness, right? I actually think it's more of an inability to bring themselves to fight back in kind. Now, of course, fighting back in kind doesn't mean inventing your own alternative facts as the MAGA [Make America Great Again] Republicans have done or indeed as Republicans have been doing back to the days of Newt Gingrich. But I think Democrats should have been and could be a lot bolder in the way they talk about things. Now, just think about lately the way this furor that President [Joe] Biden called using the word semi-fascism to describe the MAGA Republicans. Now, to me, it's self-evident that the label is appropriate. I mean, when go through the many characterizations of fascism and the tools of the fascists that are being used here. There has been a real reluctance of Democrats to call out their opponents in this way. I think it probably came from a good place that they did not want to follow Gingrich into the sewer when he said, "You don't want to start talking about Democrats as traitors, as corrupt as evil"-- the idea is that they're not just your opponent, but they're the enemy. Now of course, if we all start acting this way, then the battle is lost. The MAGA Republicans have won if we're all treating each other as traitors. But you can also at the same time strengthen your language and actually be accurate about what's happening.

**Ralph Nader:** Well, throughout the book I kept saying, how do these Republicans get away with this? They wouldn't have gotten away with this decades ago under FDR [Franklin Delano Roosevelt] or Harry Truman. How did they get away with this: lying, cheating, stealing, defaming, getting us into criminal wars of aggression, massive tax cuts for the rich and so forth? And I came up with some answers and I'd like your comment.

One is the Democrats in 1979 started dialing for the same campaign dollars from commercial and corporate interests. The second is they were inadequate in terms of redistricting competition, especially in 2009, 2010, when the Republicans took them to the cleaners with a much higher energy level and gerrymandering by winning some state legislative seats to tip the balance like in Pennsylvania. And the third is that the Democrats have abandoned whole areas of our country. How are you going to prevail if you're a Democratic Party in the Senate when you in effect give up on five states, which have ten senators and don't even compete--North Dakota, South Dakota, Wyoming, Idaho and Montana. There used to be Democratic senators from Utah and from those states. There's only one now, [Jon] Tester. And they've just given up. To punctuate this, I got a letter the other day from a friend in Laramie who said, "The party," meaning the Democratic Party, "is in rough shape. It holds only seven of 60 seats in the Wyoming House and only two of 30 in the Senate." I understand that many of Wyoming's 23 counties don't have a Democratic Party chair. The same is true in Texas until recently. And as Ben Barnes told me once the Democrats don't compete presidentially in these states, it shreds the whole party's electoral ladder all the way down to dog catcher. Can you really have a strong argument like you have in this book, *The Destructionists*--great title by the way--Can you really have a strong argument without also going into how the only other major party in a two-party duopoly basically was anemic, to put it mildly?

**Dana Milbank:** Yeah, I think the redistricting point you make in particular is a strong one. Look, there's a certain advantage rural states have now and always have had the advantage in our system. And I think you mentioned Wyoming. I think that's the state if you look at that and say compare it to California, I may have the statistics wrong here, but I think the average voter in Wyoming has more than 60 times the clout in the United States Senate as the average voter from California does. That's just the way the framers wrote it. They didn't anticipate of course how our

politics would look today. And the other way it's developed organically is you have Democratic voters in urban areas in such super majorities that this actually causes them to be underrepresented overall because of these super majorities. But you're right, that Democrats did not... I mean, they've done their own gerrymandering and still do it whenever possible, but they weren't traditionally as aggressive. They certainly didn't try the sort of mid-decade redistricting that Tom DeLay famously did in between the 2000 and the 2010 census. They were also guilty of, as you mentioned, the abuses in campaign finance. I don't think to the extent that the Republicans have been. I mean, the fight has not been symmetrical here. As I argue, the problem in our politics is not really polarization. I-mean, there is polarization, but it's one of the two major political parties has sort of ceased operating in good faith within the democratic system. So to your point, I don't mean to let the Democrats off the hook. It's just a different order of magnitude.

**Ralph Nader:** For sure, in both ways; the atrocities of the Republicans and the debilities of the Democrats.

**Dana Milbank:** Yes. Yeah.

**Ralph Nader:** One other point, the Democrats have lost two presidential elections, 2000 and 2016 where they won the national popular vote; the Electoral College took it away from them and the rest is history. They still are not supporting active Democrats who are getting interstate compacts under a movement called the nationalpopularvote.com, where they are getting states to pass laws, for example in New York, Maryland, Illinois and California, where they will pledge to send their Electoral College votes to any presidential candidate who wins the national popular vote. And they're almost up to 200 electoral votes. So they need 270 as you know, and the Democratic National Committee and the Democrats in Congress have not supported it. They've lost 12 years of the presidency—eight with [George W] Bush and four with Trump—having won the popular vote. And they will not go after the Electoral College in this interstate compact manner, which doesn't require a constitutional amendment. How do you see that one?

**Dana Milbank:** Well, look, there are many reforms that could repair our system, but as I said a minute ago, they rely on good faith participation by both of our major political parties, which we don't have. In order to get - correct me if I'm wrong - but in order to get to that 270, you're dealing with at least some states that have Republican legislatures and/or Republican governors and they're going in the other direction now. They're calling for a constitutional convention to rewrite the whole thing for the first time since 1789. And the Supreme Court looks to be on the verge of giving state legislatures the ability to completely disregard the will of the voters in elections. We may see that in the North Carolina case.

So in many ways, the real progress is regress. It's going in the other direction. So that gets back to your first point, if Democrats could find a way to compete in more of these red states, they'd be able to advance things like this. But man, it just seems, if anything, the MAGA crowd is going completely in the other direction.

**Ralph Nader:** And of course, as you know, the Republicans are a minority party figuring they can rig the system, suppress the vote, purge the vote, gerrymander, and use the Electoral College to win, even though they lose the national or even the state popular vote. You're a close observer, Dana, of politicians. Do you see a significant difference in energy levels between the Democrats and the Republicans?

**Dana Milbank:** I don't see a difference in energy levels, but I certainly see a difference in tactics. There's a difference in emotion. I think you're seeing a lot more anger and rage on the

right. In the short term here, if we're looking at say the midterm elections, they measure voter enthusiasm by how likely you are to vote. The Republicans had a real edge on that. It seems since the *Dobbs [v] Jackson Women's Health Organization* decision on abortion, a lot of these election deniers getting the Republican nomination, that has turned around and Democrats have poled even if not having a slight advantage in terms of enthusiasm. But if we're taking the lens out and looking in a broader sense of where we are in history, you are right that Republicans are a minority party. I think only once in the last seven or eight presidential elections did Republicans actually win the popular vote, and I think that was in 2004. And that was a bit of a special case because of the wars at the time.

The whole philosophy of Trumpism is to frighten the white, largely male, largely non-college educated Americans into thinking they are going to be replaced. Great replacement theory--that they are going to be pushed aside, marginalized and even made to disappear by immigrants and by racial minorities. It's that fear and paranoia that has been driving the MAGA voters to vote in disproportionately large numbers. So, if you look at the white evangelical Protestants, and again, I don't have the statistics in front of me, but they are something like 15% to 20% of the population. But they're another 10 percentage points more than that of the electorate; they're voting in extraordinarily high number. And that's because they are motivated by fear that has been stoked. So that's where the real difference is. It's in that emotion of fear, and that's a really hard one to counteract.

**Ralph Nader:** And to add to that point you made, which is a good point, is when the Democrats moved more into identity politics and away from the New Deal economic agenda, which would've meant stronger union laws, universal health insurance, and a higher minimum wage, they lost a lot of the blue-collar workers, because they weren't really competing with the old New Deal type agenda that was so successful electorally.

We're speaking with Dana Milbank, the author of the best-selling book titled *The Destructionists. The Twenty-Five Year Crack-Up of the Republican Party* is the subtitle. This book leaped to number four on the *New York Times* best seller list and its reviews have often started with Dana's accurate hypothesis. This really started with Newt Gingrich, the legislator from Georgia who overcame impossible odds and took over the Congress.

And before we get into how you analyze his rise to power, Dana, I got to give you a little vignette. I was once on the corner of the Rayburn Building with my materials, ready to go up to the House. And a ruffled guy came running around the corner with files in his hands and he said, "Mr. Nader, Mr. Nader, I'm Newt Gingrich. And I want you to help me topple Jim Wright," who was the Democratic Speaker of the House. So I looked at him and I said, "You're going to topple Jim Wright, the Speaker of the House. I mean, you don't even have much seniority, Mr. Gingrich." Well, he proceeded to surprise us, didn't he? You want to take it from there?

**Dana Milbank:** He sure did. I didn't know that little footnote to history. But yeah, I mean, Gingrich came in; I think he was 78 when he was first elected, but he quickly pioneered this sort of slashing style of politics. And that is he used the then new medium of C-SPAN to denounce Democrats on the floor of the House. Of course the viewers watching at home didn't realize that the camera was just focused on the speaker, so they didn't know that the chamber was actually empty. He denounced their patriotism and said, "How do you respond to that Democrats?" And of course there was no response since nobody was actually in the chamber. So Gingrich said, I think this was still in the eighties, that the problem with Republicans is they don't teach you to be nasty enough. And he fixed that in a hurry. One of the ways was he went after Tip O'Neill first

and then he succeeded in bringing down Jim Wright by basically alleging an unending series of ethics allegations. At least the original ethics allegations turned out to be unmerited, but it created a feeding frenzy, a constant barrage, and Gingrich was able to generate press clippings and he would hold up the press clippings as evidence that he was correct. Ironically, Gingrich was later found guilty and rebuked by the House for very similar ethics violations (chuckle) to the ones he accused Congressman Wright of having. But it was what later became known as the politics of personal destruction. And he became the number two Republican in the House because of his successful efforts to oust Representative Jim Wright. He went after Wright's successor, Tom Foley, with actual nasty personal sexual innuendos that was planted. And he forced Congressman Bob Michel, who was the House Republican leader all through the [Ronald] Reagan years, World War II veteran, a very genial guy; everybody liked him and was quite effective when you consider he got much of Reagan's agenda through a Democratic House. But Bob Michel called Gingrich's style pyrotechnics. It was just constant attack. It was war by other means, and you know, Gingrich--

**Ralph Nader:** Well, they kept not taking him seriously. They thought he was a buffoon; that he couldn't use words like that and gain a constituency within his own party. On page 30 of your book, he had a memo called "Language, a Key Mechanism of Control," and he encouraged, even demanded Republicans to speak words against the Democrats, and he listed them, like "traitors," "sick," "corrupt," "cheat," "betray," "lie," "steal," "greed," "destroy," "decay," "failure," "incompetent," "bizarre," "radical," "selfish," "shallow," "hypocrisy," "pathetic," "abuse of power," "anti-flag," "anti-family," "anti-child," "anti-jobs."

And as you point out in the book, a great deal of his accusations actually were accusations that would've characterized his own personal and political behavior. So what are the techniques that he used to rise to power and beat Bill Clinton in the 1994 congressional elections, take over Congress, defund the critical Office of Technology Assessment, as you describe, cut the staff of committees, and concentrate power in the hands of the Speaker of the House--a pattern that the Democrats unfortunately inherited and did not change to this day. Can you explain how, against all odds... I mean, who in the world in political Washington would've predicted that a guy like Newt Gingrich would've risen to the top?

**Dana Milbank:** Yes. And you're right. Certainly Democrats didn't take him seriously because they didn't believe that he could get away with this. And in truth, a lot of people didn't take Trump seriously in the same way because it seemed so shocking and indeed, it was shocking. But it was also effective in ways that nobody had really tried at least in modern times. If you look back at the Republican revolution or the Contract with America, virtually none of that became law. I think the only piece that did was paperwork reduction. So Gingrich wasn't a success in terms of public policy. Yeah, they got Clinton to compromise on welfare reform that was a temporary balancing of the budget. But by and large, the impact of Gingrich was those sorts of changes that you described. And in that sense, we're all living in Newt Gingrich's world right now, was the beginning of the enmity or an intense animosity in politics, and the beginning of the strategic use of disinformation. I go into the old Vince Foster conspiracy theories that this Clinton White House lawyer, who very obviously had killed himself, the Republicans like Gingrich encouraged the idea that he had been murdered and potentially Hillary Clinton was somehow involved in this.

And Gingrich also pioneered the notion of using government dysfunction as a weapon. The idea is during the Clinton years was if you could just throw sand in the gears of government, stop the

appropriations bills from being passed, stop anything from being enacted. This was the beginning of the government shutdowns. Gingrich famously talked about how he became more determined to shut down the government after he was forced to walk down the back stairs of Air Force One. This was the beginning of continuing resolutions and omnibus spending bills--the whole government on autopilot as opposed to legislators legislating. You mentioned taking power away from the committees and centralizing it. Also the idea of sort of an anti-Washington and early drain the swamp, if you will, the idea of having lawmakers keep their families at home in their districts. And instead of having a five-day work week in Washington, only coming in for two and a half, three days. Basically, they lost the glue that held politics together. The socialization--the idea that your families, your spouses, your kids would know each other. It was much harder to demonize the opposition when you knew them as they were friends of yours and you knew that they disagreed with you, but they were loyal Americans. So Gingrich deprived us of that glue that held our politics together. And I think a lot of the unraveling we've seen since then; it can be traced right to that moment.

**Ralph Nader:** It's really remarkable how much he taught Donald Trump. Trump was watching all of this. He was a close observer of all this, and he got the clues that you could do outrageous things. For example, you could attack veterans and get away with it. You could attack people who have great reputations and besmirch them and get away with it, even though you're using lies and fraud.

Just to make it very concrete, Dana, explain how the Republicans went after Senator Max Cleland from Georgia and Congressman [John] Murtha from Pennsylvania.

**Dana Milbank:** Yeah. And John Kerry too during the Swiftboating of 2004. This was a phenomenon of more of the Bush years and certainly the idea of calling the Democrats traitors was, as you mentioned a moment ago, a hallmark of the Gingrich time. But there was for a good while, I mean, certainly not in the [Kevin] McCarthy era, but for a long time there prevailed this notion that you can question your opponent's policies, ideas, even their sincerity, but you never really questioned their patriotism. Because if you don't accept that people on the other side of the aisle want in their own way what's good for the country, you can't really negotiate with people you believe to be traitors. So what happened after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, as you recall, there was this huge amount of national unity. You had the rally around a flag effect of... I mean George W. Bush's approval rating I think was up in the 80s – I think it was. And you had Democratic Senators Tom Daschle and Joe Lieberman hugging Bush on the House floor. It was just an extraordinary moment of national unity. What you had at that time though was Karl Rove and others came in and decided that they could exploit this. They encouraged Bush to campaign on the war. That was almost literally how they described it. And the idea was take it to voters and suggest that Democrats won't keep you safe. Republicans will keep you safe.

So you mentioned, in the case of Democratic Senator Max Cleland. He was an amputee from his service in Vietnam who became a US Senator from Georgia. Essentially, Republicans ran against him with a nod and a wink from Karl Rove, basically juxtaposed him in an ad with Osama bin Laden with Saddam Hussein suggesting that Max Cleland was essentially doing the business of the enemy. And this succeeded and in the House around the same time you had back bench Republicans calling John Murtha, as you mentioned, a decorated Marine, a coward because for his opposition to the Iraq war.

And then you had the swiftboating of John Kerry, taking his service in Vietnam for which he was highly decorated and suggesting that he lied to get his medals, that he betrayed the people who

worked with him, taking his patriotism, and turning him into effectively a traitor to his country. So this became a whole new way of doing business. They're not just your opponents, they're the enemy. They are traitors. And once again, how do you do business with people who you believe to be traitors?

**Ralph Nader:** Well, one way is to have a media that gives voice to the other side at an equal level. Let me give you an example. On page 244 in your book, you talk about Trump's words and phrases against women and I'm going to quote from your book. "He became famous for his depictions of women over the years: 'fat pig,' 'dog,' 'slob,' 'disgusting animal,' 'bimbo,' 'piece of ass.' He publicly imagined a woman giving him oral sex and spoke amorously of his daughter. During the campaign, he boasted publicly about his penis size and called Clinton 'nasty woman' when she refused to sit silently during their debate, and "called her 'disgusting', using the word disgusting, "for taking a bathroom break during the debate."

Now, people on the outside like me, Dana, say, "Okay, how's the press going to deal with this?" Your press critic, who just retired, Margaret Sullivan, thought the press was enabling Trump and the Trumpsters in the way they covered them, gave them coverage for lies and falsehoods, which other politicians and civic advocates would never get coverage for; they'd lose credibility and be blacked out in the press. But the press like the ratings; he exploited that. He bragged about it. He said, "Look at all the ratings I'm giving to CBS, NBC ABC, Fox, et cetera." Give us your view of the press's role here, and if there's a second round for 2024, if you were editor of the *Washington Post*, how would you cover Trump? Would you start covering his opponents and his critics sort of equal time or what? I'm fascinated to hear your view on this.

**Dana Milbank:** Certainly, Ralph, it's a good thing I'm not the editor and never will be of the *Washington Post*. [laughs]. But I share your critique of what happened in 2016. I think it did have something to do with ratings. I think it was also, in the same way Democrats were caught off guard, I think the press was caught off guard. And maybe we should have been prepared for this but weren't prepared for somebody who would just stand up and lie all the time. So there was sort of an old tradition of neutrality, which wasn't necessarily the correct one, but the idea is, okay, he says this, the other side says this; we're going to give equal weight to both sides. We just weren't prepared for that avalanche of falsehood. So yeah, I mean, particularly what happened a great deal with cable news and even some with network news; it was just sort of taking Trump's rallies unfiltered, free to lie for 90 minutes at a time, uncorrected in real time, sometimes uncorrected overall. And it was good TV. He's an entertainer and it was good ratings. And we certainly elevated Trump. It's hard to say which one factor brought him over the top since he didn't actually prevail in the popular vote as you noted anyway. So I think the media caught up in a way with the real time fact-checking and interjecting to declare, "All right. This is false. That's a lie. This has been disproven. This is groundless." So, I think the media have caught up to some extent. But there's another problem that's happening now and this also goes back to the Gingrich days. But Trump in particular has been so successful at poisoning his supporters into believing that the media are the enemy of the people, using the Stalinist phrase, that his supporters trust information coming from him, not from the media or to the extent they trust the media, they will trust Fox News or Breitbart News, which are essentially parroting the disinformation he puts out.

In the book, I go back to Rush Limbaugh in the early days of conservative talk radio, and of course, then there was the evolution of Fox News. And social media allows everybody to just receive whatever information reinforces their worldview. So the point is, even if what's



disparaged is the mainstream media does everything right now, there's almost no ability to reach Donald Trump's MAGA Republican voters. They're not reading the *Washington Post*. They're not watching ABC and NBC News or CNN. They're not reading the *New York Times*. So, in a way we're not talking to each other anymore. We're in sort of completely separate silos.

**Ralph Nader:** Well, one technique Trump used was he flooded daily his falsehoods and outrageous charges and slanders and epithets. So there was no time for the press—when somebody in government, for example, makes a faux pas they don't keep doubling down, tripling down. They give the press time to get counter reaction. He never gave the press time. Your illustrious colleague, Glen Kessler, the fact checker, totaled up over 35,000 lies and false statements that Trump generated in four years as president.

What do you do about politicians who when they get up in the morning, they lie in the morning; they have false statements at noon; they slander in the afternoon? Like Representative [Lauren] Boebert from Colorado, Representative [Marjorie Taylor] Greene from Georgia, Representative [Paul] Gosar from Arizona, Representative [Matt] Gaetz from Florida. How do you deal with that as a reporter? How do you deal with that as... let's stay, with the print... how do you deal with that as a newspaper? They keep reporting it. And I don't see the rebuttals. But one way the press handled it in the past is they just blacked the person out. They just didn't report anything that the person was saying. He was too much of a liar and they just crossed him off.

**Dana Milbank:** Yeah. Something's changed, hasn't it? I don't think you can ignore Trump entirely. What the press does now is... I mean, you can ignore his sort of daily pronouncements on “Truth Social” since he can't do it on Twitter anymore. Much of that has been ignored. Lately he's roared back because of the search at Mar-a-Lago and the legal dispute since then and his influence in the primaries. He can't be ignored entirely because he's the head of this political party and the most important person in that political party.

So I think what the press needs to do, and what it has been doing, is calling out the falsehoods at every step of the way, not even relying on Democrats or opponents to say it's false, but just saying in our own voices, that is false, that is not true. And when it's clear that nontruth has been documented repeatedly that it's not true--and he keeps saying it--that it's a lie. I'm not sure it has any effect though, because to Trump's supporters, the fact that we're calling out these lies only provides them further evidence that the whole system is rigged against him. So I think it reaches the limits of the power of the mass media as some sort of an entity/ some sort of an arbiter of truth. He has succeeded in convincing tens of millions of people that the free press is the enemy of the people.

**Ralph Nader:** Well, it's more than that. Now that he has surrogates who are in Congress like Kevin McCarthy, the Minority Leader of the House from Bakersfield, California, and these members that I just mentioned, it's not just him that the press has to deal with. It's a whole flurry. But my concern is that the guys that say the most outrageous, illegal, slanderous, false things and that are engaged in illegal political activities, criminal wars of aggression, are getting far more treatment than their counterparts who speak the truth and who advocate peace and justice. For example, check your own newspaper. John Bolton gets op-eds in the *Washington Post*. I don't see a counter to John Bolton getting op-eds like your former columnist, Colman McCarthy. Paul Wolfowitz gets in the *(New York) Times* and the *(Washington) Post*. One time Bolton scored a double header I've never heard of. He got an op-ed the same day on different topics in the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*. And the same with [Mike] Pompeo and all these people. The press has got to engage in a little introspection, wouldn't you say?

**Dana Milbank:** Certainly and always. What is amusing here though, is you mentioned John Bolton. You and I tend to remember him as the leading architect of war and of the Bush doctrine. Right now, he's seen as a leading Trump critic. It's a very similar story with Dick Cheney I found myself watching the ad he did for his daughter saying, "That's right, Dick." And I was like, in what world is it that I am, and I imagine you would be, too saying Dick Cheney is on the right side of this one.

So, the traditional lines, to some extent, have changed, but I certainly take your larger point that there's plenty... and I don't disagree generally. I think there's plenty of blame to give to the media; there's a whole lot of criticism out there. Maybe it's a disagreement, maybe it's not, but I just feel like even if the media gets everything right now, it's almost of no use because there is...

**Ralph Nader:** Well, but there's another problem the media has. When you write a letter to the editor of the *Washington Post*, you got to put your name on it. Social media introduced mass anonymity, which led to mass hate in all kinds of tweets. And I've been up on Capitol Hill the way you have too, Dana. I don't know whether you've asked these people... and I asked them why they don't they take Trump to task on his abuse of women. I actually wrote a letter to the women members of Congress detailing all this and I went and delivered it office by office. And I got these reactions: well, if we did anything, if we had a congressional hearing—after all it is criminal to physically assault or abuse a woman—it wouldn't affect him. He's like Teflon; he gets away with it all. Another reaction was more unsettling—you think we want him to unleash his forces of hate on social media against our family? We really don't need that; it's up to Nancy Pelosi to take the lead.

What do you do about anonymity? There are some constitutional law professors who say it's necessary for free speech. There are others who say that it can be excluded from the support for free speech, and they give their reasons. But you see, that complicates the media's conundrum, doesn't it? Because it unleashes all kinds of pressure on people who try to say the truth.

**Dana Milbank:** Yes. And I think... that's basically the point that I was making before about even if we get things right in the media, we're not necessarily going to be effective at combating the problem here. And social media is a huge part of that. So, we in the legacy media (that predominated before the Information Age) are held to one standard, but of course, in the social media sphere, the companies there are not treated as publishers as you know, and so are not subjected to the same standards that we are. Look, I'm not a lawyer and I'm not very well versed in this part of the law.

**Ralph Nader:** Do you see a replay of all this in the next few months and years going up to 2024? I mean, do you think that Trump is going to be deterred by any of the forces of law and order, public opinion, opposition by Democrats and Republicans? What's your view?

**Dana Milbank:** I've given up on the whole crystal ball thing because nothing follows the traditional patterns anymore, but just from where I stand now, I see nothing that is diminishing Donald Trump's hold over the Republican Party. The legal issues are a wild card, but politically I see nothing whatsoever other than potentially his health getting in the way of continuing to be the leader of the Republican Party going into the 2024 election. In a sense, I think the important question is less is Trump in control of the party than is Trumpism in control of the party. Because whether it's Donald Trump or Ron DeSantis, I don't think it matters that much if DeSantis is following the same politics of white nationalism and mass disinformation that we've seen from Trump. They're just continuing to go in that same direction.

**Ralph Nader:** Almost the same playbook. In your book—we're talking with Dana Milbank, *Washington Post* columnist, author of the new bestseller, *The Destructionists*, which you should give to your local library and have discussions about. It isn't just a documentation of the rising forces of political fascism American style. What's at stake at an abstract level is whether you're going to be holding onto what minimal freedoms you already have—economic, political, social, and cultural. So that brings it right down where people live, work, and raise their families, listeners. You have a chapter called “Truth isn't truth.” Tell us about it.

**Dana Milbank:** Well, that was one of Rudy Giuliani's famous statements. Although he seems to be expanding on it every day. In each of the sections, the eras of the book I cover, the Gingrich era, the Karl Rove-Bush era, the Tea Party era of Sarah Palin and Mitch McConnell, and the Trump era, you can sort of trace the disinformation. So, we talked earlier about during the 90s, that Vince Foster was sort of the prototype for what would become the big lie. They found that you could convince... I think only about 30% of the public actually accepted after all was said and done, that Vince Foster had killed himself. The rest did not necessarily accept the fact of the matter. Then during the Bush years with what Rove and Cheney did, a much more consequential lie--the suggestion that Saddam Hussein was responsible for 9/11. And that, as you well know, the weapons of mass destruction, particularly the nuclear component of that. Yes, the intelligence was bad, but it wasn't as bad as that. Even where the intelligence was quite clear, you had the Bush administration, particularly Dick Cheney, distorting it into making it much greater than it was. Lying our way into war was a much greater consequence than during the [Barak] Obama era, we had the birther lies, this notion—which Trump was involved in, of course, that the president wasn't born in the United States--dark suggestions that he was a Muslim born in Africa. And around that same time, you had the whole death panels lie that was popularized by Sarah Palin, the idea that in Obamacare was this notion that bureaucrats would run death panels, completely invented out of whole cloth and yet a large segment of the population was led to believe it.

And Republicans had learned through all of these that if you just keep repeating a lie, you win. You will convince most of your supporters to believe that lie. And that was the basis for Donald Trump and the beginning of casting doubt on the election. Even when he won the election in 2016, he was saying he would've won the popular vote by millions if all these illegal votes (chuckle) hadn't been counted. Remember he started an election fraud commission that amounted to nothing. But the big lie of 2020, 2021, that his grip of the party right now, I think, is rooted in all of those other lies, that the constant attacks on the truth, the constant attacks on the media and this conditioning of people to distrust everything.

**Ralph Nader:** And on that point, your point on page 221, “Trump's affection for alternative facts and his contempt for science came together with catastrophic results when the COVID-19 pandemic struck.” And he had words like “It'll miraculously go away.” “It's like a miracle,” he said, “It's very manageable.” And studies have shown that if he acted quickly, prudently, and mobilized the country, at least 300,000 American lives would've been saved out of the first one million. So there are lies and lies by politicians, but some have more deadly consequences than others. Tell us about the guy who really got away with it at all: Karl Rove. He's now being rehabilitated. He was just invited to a seminar at the Bohemian Grove where all the hoi polloi of corporate and political power brokers meet and drop their inhibitions in a grove in Northern California. Tell us about his wrecking crew.

**Dana Milbank:** Right. Yes, now he's an occasional Trump critic and he's a columnist for the *Wall Street Journal*, so maybe that's rehabilitation. I don't think he ever lost his reputation within the party. He's been a leader of Super PACs [political action committee] and of the whole dark money sphere of our political system.

**Ralph Nader:** Dirty tricks champion.

**Dana Milbank:** Right. That's what I was going to say. Before he was George W. Bush's lead political advisor during his presidency. He goes all the way back to the college Republican days when this was around the Watergate era when George HW Bush was running the Republican National Committee, but he and some buddies way back then that got into some trouble for dumpster diving and the likes and dirty tricks back in the day. And during his time in Texas, a whole lot of skullduggery going on there. But even more interesting is what he actually succeeded in doing when he was in the White House. There he and his political team weaponized patriotism and used the war as a political cudgel. He was also, as I detailed in a book, very involved in using disinformation as a weapon as well. But he also came across this notion that after the 2000 election, which you know something about, there was sort of an expectation that because it had been so close, because the Senate was split down the middle, because Bush hadn't won the popular vote, he would try to govern from consensus, try to reach towards the center. But Rove and his political team turned that on its head. And they basically said they didn't think there were really a whole lot of persuadable voters out there and that the whole notion of a swing voter was a myth. And what they really needed to do was motivate their base. And that, with some exceptions, became the way Bush governed, particularly in his first term. It was all about rewarding the conservative base, delighting them with the tax cut, particularly, but with a whole bunch of others.

**Ralph Nader:** And the wars that he's using, the Afghan and Iraqi war, as a wedge against the Democrats, right?

**Dana Milbank:** Yeah, no, indeed. Yeah. As we discussed earlier, but that changed politics fundamentally and he wasn't wrong about that necessarily. It's true. There are very few persuadable voters left in politics, but in part, that became a self-fulfilling prophecy that each side is only preaching to the choir and trying to mobilize their own true believers. Nobody's arguing for and competing for the middle because they've basically reached the conclusion that there's nobody to be persuaded. And that's yet another contributor to this mess we're in.

**Ralph Nader:** Is there anything else you'd like to tell our listeners that we didn't ask you about?

**Dana Milbank:** Well yeah, sure. There's one thing. When we went back, I first covered Donald Trump in 1999. You were involved in some third-party politics. He was thinking about running for the Reform Party nomination and his would-be opponent was going to be Pat Buchanan. So I was on his 727 with Roger Stone. And back then, Donald Trump wanted universal healthcare. He was pro-choice. He had been giving money to Democrats. And he was going on and on about the racism of Pat Buchanan and how we need tolerance. He went to the Simon Wiesenthal Center to preach tolerance in Los Angeles. And it just shows that Donald Trump is a Charlottean. He wasn't ideological. He just held up a mirror to where this Republican party was going. And, he was very much a monster of their own creation. So I think that little bit of third-party electoral history is useful to understand.

**Ralph Nader:** Well, the Democrats had a narrow opportunity in the reelection campaign in 1990 of Newt Gingrich to the House of Representatives. And I'd like to just briefly describe that. This

was a period when Congress wanted a big pay increase for itself. And the Speaker of the House, Tom Foley, Democrat, and the Republican Minority Leader, Bob Michel, Republican, issued a joint public statement declaring they would denounce their own candidates back home and deny them funds if the challengers raised the pay raise matter against incumbents. So here we have in Georgia, Mr. [David] Worley, a young 32-year-old Democrat running against Gingrich, and he raised the pay issue, and he asked Tom Foley and the Democrats to give him money for television in the Atlanta metropolitan area. And they refused to do so. They cut him off and Worley was catching up to Gingrich, but he didn't have any TV ad budget and he lost by fewer than a thousand votes to Gingrich. Had Worley won, we would not be having perhaps this kind of conversation today.

And I was so upset by this, that I went down to Atlanta and announced a press conference to support Worley, and the major local TV stations came in this big hotel ballroom. And just before we got underway, which would've given Worley some evening television time in Atlanta, we heard fire trucks in the distance and the TV camera people shut down their camera and lit out of the hotel to go and cover the fire. And there was nothing that evening on the evening news. I would say that in a number of ways described in your book and other ways, Gingrich had a lot of four-leaf clovers in his pocket, wouldn't you?

**Dana Milbank:** I think so. And another great footnote to history. I do sort of wonder if Gingrich didn't exist, somebody else would've been created in that position, as we discussed before. Or concurrent with Gingrich, there was Rush Limbaugh, there was Lee Atwater. So it's an interesting question of would it all have happened this way? I think if we didn't have Trump, we would've had something like Trump. I think things had already gotten so far out of hand, something like that was going to be inevitable, but it's an interesting counterfactual

**Ralph Nader:** It's an interesting point you make, but Gingrich had so many attributes and skills and determination to get what he wanted. It's hard to find in the past 30, 40 years, anybody in Congress with that kind of demonic drive and singular purpose with all the evil that he created, and he strip-mined the Congress's capability to operate itself as an oversight institution and a countervailing force against the presidency and Wall Street. To this day, I have never seen anybody with so many of these demonic attributes and energy level.

**Dana Milbank:** Well, Of course, Gingrich, he was a victim of the dysfunction he created. I mean, he was pushed out by his colleagues in a coup after just a few years of the speakership. So he kind of failed as a speaker, but he succeeded beyond his wildest imagination in changing our politics. And he's still very much a part of that.

**Ralph Nader:** Well, fulfilling the title of your book, *The Destructionists: The Twenty-Five Year Crack-Up of the Republican Party* by Dana Milbank. And let's hope they don't crack up our society in fascistic ways that seem to be on their strategic horizon in the coming elections. Thank you very much, Dana.

**Dana Milbank:** Thank you, Ralph. I enjoyed this very much.

**Steve Skrovan:** We've been speaking with Dana Milbank. We will link to *The Destructionists* 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, September 9, 2022; I'm Russell

Mokhiber. The Boeing deferred prosecution agreement is on the ropes. Victims of the Boeing 737 MAX crashes are in federal court in Fort Worth, Texas seeking to have the deferred prosecution agreement overturned. They are before Judge Reed O'Connor arguing that the Justice Department did not confer with the victims as required under the Crime Victims' Rights Act. The Justice Department and Boeing counter that the Boeing victims are not victims of the crimes documented in the agreement. "We have provided the judge with extensive in-court testimony from two highly qualified experts as well as hundreds of pages of exhibits regarding the crashes," said the victims' attorney Paul Cassell. "The record now establishes quite clearly that, directly because of Boeing's criminal lies, 346 people died." A ruling on the issue is expected in the next several weeks. For the *Corporate Crime Reporter*, I'm Russell Mokhiber.

**Steve Skrovan:** Thank you, Russel. Welcome back to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*. I'm Steve Skrovan along with David Feldman and Ralph. That's our show. I want to thank our guest again, Dana Milbank. For those of you listening on the radio, we're going to cut out now. For you, podcast listeners, you know what you can do. You're going to stay tuned for bonus material we call "The Wrap Up". And also 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, it's free, go to [nader.org](http://nader.org). For more from Russell Mokhiber, go to [corporatecrimereporter.com](http://corporatecrimereporter.com).

**Steve Skrovan:** And 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 online gift shop. You'll find books, posters, and Flaming Pinto magnets and mugs for all the tort fans in your life. That's at [store.tortmuseum.org](http://store.tortmuseum.org).

**David Feldman:** To order your copy of the *Capitol Hill Citizen "Democracy Dies in Broad Daylight,"* go to [capitolhillcitizen.com](http://capitolhillcitizen.com). 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 associate producer is Hannah Feldman. Our social media manager is Steven Wendt.

**David Feldman:** Join us next week on the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour* when our guest will be economist Michael Hudson. We'll talk about the Federal Reserve and what else is going on with our economy. Thank you, Ralph.

**Ralph Nader:** Thank you, everybody.