

RALPH NADER RADIO HOUR EP 94 TRANSCRIPT

ANNOUNCER: From the KPFK studios in Southern California, it's the Ralph Nader Radio Hour.

STEVE SKROVAN: Welcome to the Ralph Nader Radio Hour. My name is Steve Skrovan along with my co-host, David Feldman. Hello, David. Happy New Year. And the man of the hour, Ralph Nader. Happy New Year to you, Ralph.

RALPH NADER: Same to you.

STEVE SKROVAN: We have no guests on this week's show. We're going old school. The three of us are going to do sort of a bit of a year end review, a progress report, if you will. We'll also answer some listener questions and check in with Russell Mohkiber, our corporate crime reporter. So without any further ado, let's get right to it. David?

DAVID FELDMAN: Ralph, when we first started this show, you talked about raising the minimum wage. What is the progress? How did we do in 2015 with the minimum wage?

RALPH NADER: Well, there's been quite a bit of progress, largely due to a few advocacy groups and a few thousand workers from McDonald's and Walmart and Burger King picketing and demonstrating in front of their place of employment. What's happened is a remarkable surge of public opinion in favor of minimum wage. It comes in in poll after poll, between 70, 75, sometimes 80 percent of the people, which means it's a left-right situation. A lot of conservative workers in Walmart want to earn at least as much as Walmart workers earned in 1968 adjusted for inflation. Listeners may say, "What?" Yeah. Thirty million workers in this country are making less than workers made in 1968, adjusted for inflation, even though worker productivity is doubled. And the largest number of these workers do not work for small business. They work for the big box companies, for example, the Target and Walmart and the fast food companies and other regional chains around the U.S. So what's happened is that more and more cities, San Francisco, Seattle, San Jose, more and more cities are raising the minimum wage just on their own. More and more states are raising, California, Connecticut, New York,

are raising the minimum wage. Chris Christie, the governor of New Jersey, vetoed a very modest minimum wage passed by the legislature in Trenton. But across the country, we're seeing increasing the minimum wage from the federal minimum wage, which is frozen at \$7.25 an hour, they're going to \$8.50, 9. Seattle is targeted for \$15 an hour in a couple years. California is heading for \$12 an hour.

And most amazingly, we were trying, David and Steve, to get the New York Times interested in this. Steve Greenhouse wrote a couple columns and articles, the labor reporter, four, five, six years ago. But this last Sunday, the Times has come out for a \$15 minimum wage. I mean, I would have thought that's impossible. But it was pushed by Governor Cuomo, who suddenly saw the light after ignoring requests to increase New York's minimum wage, and now he's pushing for \$12, \$12.50 an hour for government workers, fast food workers. I mean, it's all beginning to congeal. Yet, this wave across the country has not yet touched the Republicans on Capitol Hill. So in Congress, there are bills now ranging from \$10.10 an hour to \$12.50 an hour phased over three years that even Hillary Clinton has now supported after much reluctance in recent years. But nothing is happening because Senator McConnell of Kentucky and Speaker Paul Ryan from Wisconsin have frozen. They're not moving at all. But I think it's going to be irresistible. And I think more workers should really get out there on the streets. That's what's really leading to the press, to the mayors, the city councils, the state legislatures getting on this.

STEVE SKROVAN: So Ralph, how does that work? So when a city like Seattle or a state like New York raises their minimum wage, is that just for government workers, that's the only power they have?

RALPH NADER: No, unless it's specified as such. No, it's for everybody working in the city. If they pass an ordinance saying only for government workers, then it's only for government workers. But, Seattle has moved for everybody in the city going to \$15 an hour. Of course, this will increase consumer demand. It'll put more necessities on family tables, it'll create more jobs, more sales. It's all a plus. You know, some right wing economist say, "Oh, it's going to cost jobs." Well, it's going to create a lot of jobs. There's always going to be a cost of some jobs, but it's going to create a lot more jobs. Not only that, but

the most important thing is it's going to sustain some of these families. I mean, how in the world can a family of four live on seven and a quarter an hour, eight bucks an hour, nine bucks an hour without any benefits? Impossible. So it does put a dent in the poverty that is epidemic in this country.

DAVID FELDMAN: What about inflation? The conservatives will say raising the minimum wage means we'll be paying more, so it doesn't matter.

RALPH NADER: Well, first of all, there's a lot of unused capacity, so to the extent that it increases production based on consumer demand, that's not going to wash, because there's a lot of empty capacity. As far as raising, interesting article recently in the press that the restaurants in these areas are not raising their prices for the customer. They're absorbing it. Or they're getting equivalent benefits, because there's less employee turnover, less time to try to recruit, less paperwork, more motivated workers. And we're not talking about, you know, \$20 an hour here. We're talking about long overdue restoration of what would be considered gutted pay. It's quite remarkable that all these years, when people were actually getting a reduced minimum wage gutted by inflation, there's no claim to get it back from these large, big box stores like Walmart. So this is a very, very modest move, but it's very encouraging because of how it's happening – from the streets and from a few citizen groups such as ourselves pummeling the media to pay attention to it and putting out reports. It's also supported by a lot of conservatives. I mean, Ron Unz is a leading conservative, ran for governor in California, has put a lot of argument, conservative argument, saying look, “You increase the minimum wage, less burden on the taxpayer for housing assistance, for food stamps, for energy cost supplements.” So this is a good example of left/right alliance. And I hope there's going to be a breakthrough. I hope that the Republican candidate, whoever the Republican candidate is, will be forced to take a position on this once the primary furor is cleared.

DAVID FELDMAN: Well Trump, speaking of furor, little pun, Trump said that wages are too low in this country.

RALPH NADER: Yeah, he just changed his mind, David.

DAVID FELDMAN: Yeah.

RALPH NADER: Earlier he had blurted out they're too high, "We have to compete with the rest of the world." But I guess someone said to him, Donald, look, most of these workers are service workers in fast food restaurants. They don't compete with the rest of the world. I mean, low paid workers in Shanghai aren't going to fax hamburgers to Toledo. And so now he's come out saying, "No, no, we got to raise wages." So that's important, even though he's sort of a buffoon in so many areas. It's important that he's changed his mind on this.

DAVID FELDMAN: We have to move on to the next topic, Steve, but I just want to point out that Ralph was the first one this year to say don't underestimate Donald Trump. And I thought, "What is Ralph talking about?" Well.

STEVE SKROVAN: Well, I just have a new idea for a new app: faxing hamburgers from Toledo. I'm going to cut short the broadcast now and go work on that. Yes. So let's switch topics now. We've done minimum wage. Where are we, Ralph, on the national security state? Are we better off now than we were a year or so ago?

RALPH NADER: We are in one way: in that most people now know that mass dragnet surveillance of every email and telephone number, called meta-surveillance, that is, they don't actually listen. There aren't enough people in the world to listen or read these calls, telephone calls and emails. But these banks have them, gigantic computer databases for future reference. People now know it's illegal. It violates our Constitution. It violates the Intelligence Act, which in effect says such activity without judicial approval is a first class felony with a potential five-year jail term. But of course, nobody in the Justice Department is prosecuting anybody in the NSA or other intelligence agencies. But it's important that now everybody knows the government's operating systemically and illegally. The Congress apparently tried to put a stop to some of this, but it's still going on. The New York Times reported nobody knows the extent, but every time there is a slaughter by guns in the U.S., the cry goes

out, “See? All these liberals and civil libertarians trying to restrict NSA’s dragnet surveillance, it’s leading to a situation where we can’t head off these massacres.” Well, there’s no evidence at all that any of the surveillance since day one has ever headed off any slaughter or any explosion here or abroad. But the next step is basically to put it under a rigorous judicial approval. And there’s no reason why the government can’t go to judges. The judges are in-camera; they’re not in opened court. And dragnet surveillance leads to sloppy enforcement, because there’s no probable cause when you have every American surveilled. I mean, it’s a per se violation of the Fourth Amendment. So it forces the enforcement people to be more rigorous, more focused, when they have to go to a judge. Because they can’t go to a judge and say, “Judge Jones, we want a warrant to put every American under surveillance.” I mean, that’s not going to happen. So I think the next step is to bring it under judicial warrant approval, which is what the Founding Fathers provided for all along.

STEVE SKROVAN: It seems in the Republican debate from a few weeks ago, as well as a little bit in the Democratic debate, there was a lot of talk about we’re not doing enough in this area. And I think Carly Fiorina was talking about the government is not efficient at it, we need to privatize it and that will enable us to stop all of these terrorist attacks. Of course, they don’t talk about terrorist attacks when it’s attacking the Planned Parenthood building or shooting up a church in South Carolina. It’s only terrorist when brown people do it, I guess.

RALPH NADER: Yeah, that’s a rather selective use of the word “terror.” First of all, there’s state terror. I mean, you know, when the U.S. bombs wedding parties, kids on hillsides collecting firewood in Afghanistan, blows up the Doctors Without Borders clinic, or knowingly blows up buildings because there’s a suspect here and there, never mind if it’s evidentially based, and they take out collateral damage, other families. That is state terror. And we got to call it as such. And it’s killed thousands and thousands of people in Iraq and Afghanistan. Then there’s the regular, conventional terror from Al Qaida and ISIS. And then, as you say, there are now massacres in the U.S., but if it’s by a white Anglo-Saxon who went berserk, that’s not considered terror.

STEVE SKROVAN: It's just a madman.

RALPH NADER: Yeah. And I think that's because we always have to have an "ism" to scare the people. In the years past, it was communism. Communism collapses, what's next to sustain the military industrial complex? To have politicians intimidate dissent in America, to build up a multi-billion dollar industry fighting terrorism? So it all really goes back, doesn't it, David and Steve, to how much homework people do on politics? How much reading they do? I mean, if they just do a few hours in a presidential year, they'll be able to call out these phony politicians who are engaging in the primary debates -- if you want to call them debates -- in incredible political belligerency, incredible political belligerency. I mean, here's Donald Trump saying when we kill the terrorists, we also have to kill their families, because if the terrorists think their families are going to be killed they might not engage in such violence. This is stuff that would be unheard of in political Republican primaries years ago. Even in the height of the Communist peril, you didn't get language like this. Now why is it getting worse and worse? Because there's no pushback from people. There's no pushback in the polls.

People ought to be very, very ready, if the telephone rings and it's a pollster, that they know that they're speaking for tens of thousands of people, because they poll like 1,500 Americans and extrapolate that to the whole population. So when you're called by a pollster, you have a huge opportunity to effect the outcome of that poll as it's extrapolated nationwide. It has always amazed me how people are willing to engage in such intricate study, you know, like computer manuals for their computer or video game rules, and OK, that's for entertainment and utility. But listen, these politicians have a huge Sword of Damocles over your lives, people, in many ways. And you know it. And your grumbles focus on it. They're eroding your standard of living, they're unemploying you with these trade agreements. They're sending your children off to wars of aggression that get nowhere except to create more hostility. They're wasting your tax dollars in Washington. You're on top of it, but you don't take it to the next stage and say, who are these people who are presuming to run for President and speak on our behalf here and

overseas? We better find out about them. And the more you find out about them, I guarantee you, the more they're going to squirm, the more they're going to shape up.

STEVE SKROVAN: Well, policy is hard for people. This is what I find. That we have created in the media sort of a reality show, is what these primaries are. And people seem to be under the mistaken impression that they could judge these candidates by their character, sort of ignoring the fact that these are very filtered images that are being broadcast to them, very controlled, very managed. So when I talk to people about presidential candidates, they'll talk about whether they can trust them or whether they think they're a liar, or things that are really unknowable and ultimately probably not all that important. But if you ask them about policy, unless it's a social issue that has a real emotional content like abortion or gay marriage, they don't think about it in that way.

RALPH NADER: And that's the way they're manipulated, Steve. Because if you evaluate a candidate for public office on one issue that's really dear to your heart, let's say it's abortion, as you say, or gay marriage or school prayer or gun control. That politician's got you, because that politician will basically say "Hey, I give this citizen what he or she is demanding. They don't care about all the other stands I'm taking on behalf of Wall Street. They don't care about all the other stands I'm taking on behalf of my paymasters, the multi-billionaires and the billionaires and the mega-millionaires." So the way you increase your bargaining power -- there ought to be seminars on this and they'll be a lot of fun in local neighborhoods -- the way you increase your bargaining power is, it's like they say in football, you spread out the defense. You spread out the number of issues that you're demanding a response from your candidates from. And the more that you spread out the issues, like let's say you have ten categories. Alright, what's your stand on capital gains taxes being lower than sweat taxes, the taxes of people who go to work every day and have to pay more than someone who sells a stock on the stock market? What's your stand on expanding Social Security? What's your stand on full Medicare for all to cut the cost of healthcare almost in half, as they do in Canada, and give free choice of doctor and hospital and save lives and huge anguish and no more complex bills? What are you doing about medical fraud by these hospitals

and these drug companies? You see, when you ask them all that, they're totally floored. They don't know how to deal with you. But they have increased their respect, if not fear of you as a voter.

Now how do you transmit this to candidates? Well, you can do through email. You can do it through fax. You know, it's easy to get their office or campaign office. They don't hide that. Or you could do it by telephone or when you meet the candidates you can do it. You can't believe how it will somersault them into sanity land, where they're going to have to shape up or ship out.

DAVID FELDMAN: I'd like to get back to the national security state for one question about Rahm Emanuel. People are asking him to step down because of the police shootings of African Americans and then the Grand Jury failed to indict the police officers in the shooting of Tamir Rice. There's no question that there's a problem with racism on our police forces. But is it safe to say that a lot of these cops are paranoid about getting shot? And if they're paranoid about getting shot, why isn't there a left/right alliance with the police calling for gun control? I remember Bill Clinton had the police standing with him when he introduced the Assault Weapons Ban. Why aren't the police stepping up and calling gun violence a law and order issue? Isn't this something the Democrats could run on, taking on the NRA by using the police?

RALPH NADER: That has happened, David. But for some reason, although the police support gun control, like they don't want assault rifles, heavy weaponry, they haven't been that fervid about it. Partly because, you know, in their private lives they resonate with the NRA freedom to carry any kinds of arms and not have to license and register, and partly because they're not led by police commissioners as a major priority. They have so many other priorities in policing the city. But you're right, I mean, and Clinton noticed that and used it. You have police standing next to you at a press conference on gun control, that should be pretty persuasive. I suppose it ought to be focused on more, and see if it can become more an intense political effort. Because the police unions have a lot of political power. Again, though, what do they want to use it on? Do they want to expend it on this? Do they want to expend it on

higher wages, different work rules? See, they're all trading off, that's one of the problems with the police constituency on gun control, they have other priorities.

DAVID FELDMAN: Well, another issue that we want to get an update on is gridlock in Washington, DC. Is anything getting done in Washington?

RALPH NADER: Well, they did the budget deal quickly with the new Speaker of the House, Paul Ryan. But the price that Obama paid for it, it's like a 2,000-page monstrosity, it's got a lot of Christmas tree goodies for commercial interests. I mean, corporate lawyers on K Street streamed into the cabs and limousines headed for Capitol Hill on this one. And one thing they, for example, was an end to this 40-year ban on exporting oil, because you know, oil was scarce in the U.S. in terms of the demand, and there was a lot of imported oil, so the Congress years ago said there's no way you're going to export oil because you can get a higher price for it on a spot market. Well, now they're going to start exporting oil. But there are other tax loopholes. There is a billion dollar loophole that the New York Times highlighted that was pushed by the restaurant and gambling interests. And they got it through, I guess, by contacting the Democratic leader in the Senate, Harry Reid, from gambling land in Las Vegas. So why did the gridlock end, David? Because there were a lot of nice freebies, which of course come with Christmas gifts, which are campaign contributions. So they cut a very opportunistic, expedient deal and at least they got it done. There is going to be no government shutdown and both parties heaved a huge sigh of relief as they got into their planes and went back home from Congress.

DAVID FELDMAN: Paul Ryan has been giving some interviews where he says he wants the Republican Party to be a party of ideas. Do they have any new ideas?

RALPH NADER: Well, we've had enough of *his* ideas. I mean, over the years his ideas were crazy. Like here's my Paul Ryan plan to balance the budget, and it turned out when you looked at the fine print, it not only cut taxes for the wealthy, it didn't balance the budget for fifteen years. So his kind of ideas are truly bizarre. If I was talking to him, I'd say, Speaker Ryan, you say your ideological hero is

Frederick von Hayek, the Austrian economist who came to the U.S. to live. But you're against full Medicare for all virally. You want to repeal Obamacare. You voted many, many times in the House to repeal Obamacare, never mind replacing it with full Medicare for all, everybody in, nobody out, more efficient, free choice of doctor and hospital, no nonsense about complex, abstruse coded billings that are full of fraud, no nonsense about going out of network or staying into network. You know what, Speaker Ryan? He says, "What?" "Well, your hero, the person you've told everybody gave you your intellectual mentorship, Frederick von Hayek, he was against Medicare and Medicaid." "Yeah, of course, I know that," says Paul Ryan. And I say, "Well, you know, Speaker Ryan, do you know why he was against Medicare and Medicaid? Why?" "Because it was big government," says Paul Ryan. "No. Because Frederick von Hayek wanted everyone to be under Medicare. He didn't like discriminatory social services, picking and choosing. He wanted full Medicare. What do you say about that, Speaker Ryan? Speaker Ryan? Speaker Ryan? Where are you, Speaker Ryan?"

DAVID FELDMAN: He can't speak.

STEVE SKROVAN: I think he hung up.

RALPH NADER: You see? A little homework goes a long way with these people.

DAVID FELDMAN: Right. And Hayek believed in a safety net. He said there were some things that the free market couldn't do, right?

RALPH NADER: Exactly. Even Ludwig von Mises, the most radically right wing libertarian anti-government economist said, "Look, there's certain values in our society that money cannot deal with, that the marketplace cannot deal with." And all the way back to Adam Smith. Adam Smith believed in public education. He believed in public works. He hated corporate monopolies and corporate conspiracies. He wanted a fair day's wage for a fair day's work, because he said then people will spend money in the marketplace to build an economy. I don't think liberals generally and progressives generally

realize how grotesquely that today's Republicans have twisted and distorted and bulldozed their intellectual heroes in the past, the great conservative writers and philosophers.

STEVE SKROVAN: So Ralph, do you think that on the right, whether it's these presidential candidates or anybody else speaking from that point of view, that they are ideologically motivated? That that's sincere or is it just cynical campaign contributions?

RALPH NADER: Some of it gets very sincere if your money comes from the source that wants you to talk that way. That's one. But there's something else that isn't often pointed out, Steve and David, and that's this. If the early primaries were California and Massachusetts, even the Republican candidates that you're watching in these so-called debates would sing a different tune. Because what they're doing is they have very, very microscopic pollsters, and they're basically saying look, here's who we think's going to turn out in the busses in the Iowa caucus. They're going to have this demographic. They're going to have this age. They're going to have this single issue mania. And so if you want to win the Iowa primary, you better listen to us, the pollsters, who say that the people who are likely to get in those busses and go to the voting places, this isn't a primary, folks, this is the caucus, lower grade, are people who are really angry on immigration. They really are angry. They want their own taxes cut. And so they just mesh with that. If it was a different state where the issues are, say, environment, they were dealing with water, they were dealing with clean air, they were dealing with minimum wage, they would talk a different tune.

DAVID FELDMAN: How much of a bellwether is Iowa? It seems to me Jimmy Carter was the one who turned the Iowa caucuses into something important. But they really don't, I think. Did Santorum win the Iowa caucus?

RALPH NADER: Yes, last time, and then he disappeared. He started fading out in New Hampshire. It's all what the press makes it out to be, because if the press ballyhoos the winner, the winner gets a momentum, the winner gets visibility, recognition, momentum. It's all such a stupid game, because to go from Iowa to New Hampshire to South Carolina to Michigan and then suddenly you have the

Southern state primary, you know, you begin to say there's another America out there, isn't there? But you know, Clinton, when he was elected President, he lost the New Hampshire primary. Iowa wasn't a factor. Then he started picking it up in the South. I think the Iowa and New Hampshire caucus primary are losing their momentum. However, they get a lot of press. But not for long, because the other primaries have been pushed up to crowd them on the calendar.

STEVE SKROVAN: Well, how is that determined? There seems to be a lot of tradition in the Iowa and New Hampshire being first. What would it take to change that? Why does it matter if it would be changed? Would it matter if Massachusetts were?

RALPH NADER: Very good question. In fact, yeah, when you ask people, why do the Democrats have to go along with Iowa and New Hampshire? Why don't they have their own early primaries in Massachusetts and California or Oregon? The answer is: it's not up to them; it's up to state law. And the way New Hampshire became first is it was very clever years ago. Basically it said look, if we're first, we're going to get a lot of business in this state. All kinds of people are going to come in. Media, pollsters, suppliers. And so they put the primary date early, in February. And when other states started saying hey, we want to do the same thing, New Hampshire legislature threatened to do it in December. And so they said well, we can't win that game. So they stepped back, the other states, and conceded the Iowa caucus first and then the New Hampshire primary. So it is up to the state legislature. OK, if it's up to the state legislature, who controls Massachusetts, overwhelmingly, and California in the state legislature? The Democrats. So what they could do, but they seem seized by kind of custom and tradition, what they could have done is said OK, the Massachusetts primary and the California primary is going to be before the Iowa caucus. They're going to be January 15th. Well, then what happens? The other states say, you want to play that game? OK. New Hampshire legislature will push it up to January 10. So it kind of deters the Democrats from doing what could change the kind of issues that are discussed early in a presidential campaign, the kind of things that are debated on, the kind of matters and redirections for the country that really are significant.

DAVID FELDMAN: There is a Jeffersonian aesthetic that we're in love with. We like the candidates being in Iowa and New Hampshire, the retail politics to it all. That's more important to us, it seems.

RALPH NADER: I think so. But you know, sometimes, and I'm glad you pointed that out, David, because you remember Mark Everson who was on our program?

DAVID FELDMAN: Yes.

RALPH NADER: OK. He, this is really an amazing, I mean, I'm pretty jaded on some things when it comes to political routines. Here's a man who's running for the Republican presidential nomination, Mark Everson. He is the first to announce, and he's the first to go into every one of Iowa's 32 counties and campaign personally. He's the only one of all the sixteen, seventeen Republican primary candidates who has Executive Branch experience. Under George W. Bush he was the head of the IRS and head of the Immigration Service. Two hot button agencies, right? I mean, he wasn't head of the Canadian/U.S. Boundary Commission, OK? And he cannot get on the Republican debates. I mean, we had him on our program. He's a sane fellow. You know, he doesn't go off half cocked the way Carly Fiorina or Chris Christie or Rubio on let's kill everybody around the world who doesn't like us. You know, he's a sane fellow. So we asked him, remember on the program? Is the Republican Party keeping you off? No. He said the Republican Party isn't keeping him off. He has good relations with them. And then we revealed to our listeners that who was keeping him off was the particular cable channel that was exclusively sponsoring the debate. Like CNN, Fox. So the next question is, "Why are they keeping him off?" I mean, they have people who don't even register one tenth of one percent in the polls, like former Governor Pataki or Governor Jindal, Governor Pataki of New York, Jindal of Louisiana. He's dropped out. Well, here's the answer. Mark Everson has not raised a lot of money. He doesn't have a Super PAC sponsor. He doesn't have a billionaire sponsor. He hasn't raised a million dollars, and therefore he's done. Even though he has more executive experience than all the other Republican primary candidates combined. Now you think this would interest some curious reporter from the New York Times or the

Wall Street Journal or the Washington Post? No, they could care less. So this is where people got to take matters into their own hands. I think if he got fifty or a hundred people to demonstrate in front of the debate locale, he might have gotten some press because the reporters were all there. But he did show up. They wouldn't let him in. But he didn't have fifty or a hundred people doing it.

STEVE SKROVAN: So they're measuring it by how much money he's raised and whether that makes him viable and worth their attention?

RALPH NADER: Yeah. And of course, in the old days, if you were measured like that, people would say you don't want to give someone a chance to have a chance? Why don't you give someone a chance? I mean, what if a small business has very little money, but they have a good product and they have energy? You say, "Ah, we don't want to deal with a small business." So that's the problem with our political winner take all Electoral College presidential system, is it does not give anyone a chance to have a chance. A Jimmy Carter could never make it today. Even as Governor of Georgia, he started out with very little money. He flies up to a small town in New Hampshire with a simple main street with a few stores, and he starts out, I think there's two reporters from Georgia, and he starts out and he's saying, "Hi, I'm Jimmy Carter and I'm running for president." And the rest is history. Can't happen today. He's the first to admit it.

DAVID FELDMAN: He was also a compromise candidate in '76 for liberals, right? He wasn't as liberal as we remember him to be.

RALPH NADER: Yeah, well it was heavily done in the primaries. You know, Jerry Brown was two years in the governorship of California at that time, and he challenged him. He got, Jerry Brown got into the race late, and he started winning some primaries. But Jimmy Carter had a head start. And at the Democratic Convention, Jimmy Carter quipped that he was glad Jerry Brown didn't get in earlier. But no, it was, he pretty much was a very good organizer in primaries, Jimmy Carter. And he had enough to take it through the Convention without it being brokered.

STEVE SKROVAN: Well, let's switch topics again, and Ralph, let's talk about energy, alternative energy. Where do you think we are a year past?

RALPH NADER: Tremendous progress in renewable energy. Very modest progress in conservation of energy, in like more efficient cars and buildings. And still the stubborn, "all of the above" policy of Barack Obama and Congress, "Oh, we want all kinds of energy. We want nuclear, oil, gas, coal, solar, wind, geothermal and conservation." Doesn't work that way. There's a new book by David Freeman, who is an engineer and a lawyer, knows more about energy than anybody in the country. He ran the Tennessee Valley Authority, three other giant utilities from California to New York. He's written books. He's advised presidents. He's advised the governors of New York, Cuomo, and Jerry Brown. He helped close down a nuclear plant in Sacramento when he was running the utility there. And he's just written a book, and he basically says that "all of the above" is total nonsense. It's technological nonsense. It's temporal nonsense. It takes twenty years to get a nuclear plant underway, or fifteen years, where you can get energy efficiency in a matter of months, where you can get renewable solar in a matter of months. So he said this "all of the above" is a copout. It's a surrender to the corporate interests. And his proposal is three percent a year we replace fossil fuels and nuclear. At three percent a year over thirty years, we replace it with growing wind power, solar thermal, solar photovoltaic, more efficient insulation of homes and buildings, etc. And by then, we have an all-electric economy. No more coal, no more oil, no more gas, no more wars, no more trade deficits. And it's really an irrefutable argument. Except that Congress is not into irrefutable arguments, they're into irresistible campaign cash.

STEVE SKROVAN: We had him on the show this year.

RALPH NADER: Yes. And he was extremely clear. Nobody wants to debate him. He can't get on the mass media. And he can't even get on Democracy Now because they're always, you know, more well known people who are chosen, who have a progressive viewpoint. But nobody really has the depth and experience that he has. And I hope that he gets on Democracy Now. I hope that he gets on the News Hour of PBS. There's a little ageism in these networks, too, even if they're progressive or liberal. They

don't like to put on older people. Like he was an energy advisor to Lyndon Johnson. But he makes more sense. He's articulate. He talks in concise, factual paragraphs. He has intensity in his voice. We're losing a lot of wise people in this country from getting on the mass media, even the liberal media, even NPR doesn't have him on. I don't know. Do you have any ideas on how to get David Freeman on?

STEVE SKROVAN: I spoke to him a couple weeks ago actually, because I'm working on this documentary about nuclear power, and his latest campaign is to shut down Diablo Canyon Nuclear Power Plant in Central California, which is on three different fault lines. And you can't believe the energy just coming through the phone from this guy, and I think he's pushing 90 if he's not already. Doesn't matter.

RALPH NADER: He's in his late, late 80's.

STEVE SKROVAN: Late 80's, yeah. It doesn't matter, because like yourself, Ralph, you've got tremendous energy and a reason to keep fighting.

RALPH NADER: Well, I think if you and David made some calls, it might help. Made some calls to Amy Goodman, made some calls to the News Hour, NPR.

STEVE SKROVAN: Well, when my movie comes out, he will definitely be someone we insist be one of our expert witnesses. He's already -- we've already filmed him, and we will insist that he be one of our expert witnesses when they do their debates about whether nuclear power is good or not for people.

RALPH NADER: His book's coming out next month. That ought to be an occasion to get some media, too.

STEVE SKROVAN: Right. And we should have him back on the show when the book comes out.

RALPH NADER: Indeed.

DAVID FELDMAN: If a crime is committed on a massive scale, is it ever possible to prosecute? This new investigation by Inside Climate News and the Los Angeles Times is revealing that Exxon and

all the oil companies knew about climate change as far back as the 70's, and they kept it under wraps. Can you envision a time if the weather keeps changing the way it is, where somebody is going to sue these oil companies?

RALPH NADER: Well, there is a possibility for a civil justice suit, just as there was in the tobacco area, where they can say, "OK, you covered up a situation that is erupting and damaging my property and my health and my community, and that's climate change." And they could sue Exxon. It would be a pioneering breakthrough. They'd have to show duty and causality. Well, I think they could show duty. I mean, corporations really have a duty to not lie, to tell the truth to their customers and their community. And then they have to show causality, which would be much more difficult. Well, they did show a causality, obviously, in tobacco and lung cancer and heart disease. They had the Surgeon General's evidence and other testimony. As a criminal case, David, I don't think so. That standard is much higher. It has to be beyond a reasonable doubt of criminal intent, and second, the causality factor. They really get a criminal case going against the tobacco companies, even though it was based in part on their lying under oath. Remember that famous House committee hearing in Congress, where they all stood up, their hands were up, and "Do you swear to tell the truth?" They said, "Yes," they sat down, and then Congressman Henry Waxman asked them one by one, "Do you believe that tobacco smoking causes cancer?" And they all said, "No." And it turned out that their own company records showed that there was a causality there. And even then, there wasn't a criminal prosecution. But the civil case against the tobacco industry, you know, it was \$250 billion over time, to a variety of state governments to compensate them for the health insurance and other costs that they had to distribute, because people came down with tobacco-induced ailments, because they were basically deceived. Let's put it this way. Until the labeling started, the tobacco companies were telling people and kids as young as 12 "This is good for you. It relaxes you. You can enjoy it. It improves your concentration at work." So the thing that really finally nailed the tobacco industry was deception in the marketing of their products, and the cover up of known evidence about the deadly effect of tobacco usage in this country, which was taking, catch this,

over 400,000 lives a year. That's about every year the number of U.S. soldiers who died in World War II, in the entire war.

STEVE SKROVAN: Well, we are at about the three quarter mark in the show here, so we have a couple more year end topics I want to get to, and then we'll get to a listener question or two. But right now, let's take a short break and check in with our corporate crime reporter, Russell Mohkiber. Russell?

RUSSELL MOHKIBER: From the National Press Building in Washington DC, this is your corporate crime reporter morning minute for Friday, January 1, 2016. I'm Russell Mohkiber. The ongoing corporate crime wave showed no signs of abating in 2015. That's according to a year end report by Philip Mattera at *Dirt Diggers Digest*. BP paid a record \$20 billion to settle the remaining civil charges relating to the Deep Water Horizon disaster, on top of the \$4 billion in previous criminal penalties. And Volkswagen is facing perhaps even greater liability in connection with its scheme to evade emissions standards. Other auto makers and suppliers were hit with large penalties for safety violations, including a \$900 million fine for General Motors, a record civil penalty of \$200 million for Japanese airbag maker, Takata, penalties of \$105 million and \$70 million for Fiat-Chrysler, and \$70 million for Honda. For the corporate crime reporter, I'm Russell Mohkiber.

STEVE SKROVAN: Thank you for that, Russell. David?

DAVID FELDMAN: The IRS, we were talking about Mark Everson, who's running for President. He was a former Commissioner of the IRS and he's a Republican. During the Republican debates, we heard some candidates talking against corporate inversions and collecting the taxes that are owed to us. Is there a possible left/right alliance on making the IRS strong again?

RALPH NADER: I think so. When you get down to Main Street and Elm Street where people work, live, raise their families, you say to them, look, these big corporations are tax escapees in a variety of ways, both illegal and by getting their protection laws through Congress greased with campaign money. They are depriving the U.S. Treasury of tens of billions of dollars, which means either you get

less government services, you get more government deficit, or you have to pay more taxes. So that's a pretty powerful common sense argument. And the Republicans in Congress are insanely cutting the enforcement budget of the IRS. It's down to about \$10.7 billion. They may get another \$500 million, but it was \$12.5 billion a few years ago. It's lower than it was 25 years ago, adjusted for inflation. Which means you call the IRS and they put you on hold for an hour or half hour. They're totally overwhelmed. So you can't get your own questions answered. All because these Republicans in Congress think they're scoring points by attacking the IRS. At the same time, they want a bigger defense budget, which requires more tax money, they want to reduce the deficit, which, you know, would require more tax money, they want to cut your public works repair in your communities, they've been holding up the Highway Bill until recently. We're on these crumbling highways and bridges, couldn't even get the money for repairs so you could be safe with your families, and the voters are letting the Republicans run the Congress? That's because they're not doing their homework. It has nothing to do with left right. It has everything to do with people spending a few hours saying, "What kind of country you want to live in, and why is our power delegated to 535 men and women in Congress being so abused and turned against us? They're using our power, we resent it, we take it personally, we're going to do something about it." So I want to recommend to the listeners, start a letter head group. Even if it's just ten of your friends and neighbors or coworkers, and call it Left Right Alliance to Watchdog our Two Senators and Representatives, and name them. The two Senators from your state and the Representative. And then start watchdogging. Start challenging them. And add twenty, thirty, maybe have a little potluck supper. Maybe you're going to your service club. Yeah, I want to be on there. And so pretty soon the Senators and the Representatives back in Congress, they see this group growing, and they see left right. They can't pigeonhole you. They can't dismiss you. Something is coming there, and they see that what you're pushing is represented by a majority in the national polls. And then you have a lot of fun. It's like a Congress watchdog club. I think it beats bowling and poker. I don't know about bridge.

STEVE SKROVAN: Oh, you have a soft spot for bridge. That's interesting.

DAVID FELDMAN: So does Governor Chris Christie. He has a soft spot, not for a bridge.

RALPH NADER: Not bad, David, not bad.

STEVE SKROVAN: There we go. David's on the board. OK. Alright. Before we get to some listener questions, let's do one more topic, and this is one that we talked about a lot. Ralph, what is the progress report on the free trade issue, Trans Pacific Partnership in particular?

RALPH NADER: Very good. It's dead for 2016. No vote according to the iron ruler of the Senate, Senator Mitch McConnell, Republican. He's hearing from his folks back home, Republicans and business people. You know, this thing, we don't know what's in it. What we hear doesn't look good for us. It may look good for some countries abroad. These countries are taking us again because our multi-national corporations want cheap labor and bribable governments overseas. They have no patriotism to the U.S. even though they were born in the U.S. and made profits with U.S. workers in the U.S. and were bailed out by U.S. taxpayers in the U.S. And so he announced a few days ago to President Obama, "It's not going anywhere in 2016." So I think that the more people know about it, the more the polls are coming out against it. It may be dead in the water. All five thousand pages of it. So you see, folks, when people push back, when you push back and you get alert and you read about some of these policies and these proposals, they're going to tie you up. The people still are sovereign. The politicians don't want to tell you, but they fear you when you are awake, alert and feed back to them. They fear you. That's the healthy aspect of our society. As long as the politicians and big business fear the rumble from the people, there's a great deal of hope that we can recover the sovereignty of the people for a prosperous and productive democratic society.

STEVE SKROVAN: Well, that's an excellent way to close out our little year end review before we get to listener questions. I will take the first one. These are all from our website, by the way, not Facebook this time. And our first question is Javier Oliveras, and he asks, Ralph, when Ron Paul tried to

audit the Fed in the early 2000's, he says I've seen a YouTube video that Bernie and the other Dems agreed and changed their vote the last minute. Is the Fed really that bad, or is it just in the wrong hands?

RALPH NADER: Well, the Federal Reserve is the central banker. In other countries, it's called the Chancellor of the Exchequer. It's a cabinet ministry. We have the hybrid system where it's sort of like an independent agency that gets its money from assessments on the banks in the country. It doesn't ask Congress for appropriations. So it's easier to run out of control. And I think it's gone way beyond its authority with a lot of what it's been doing after the collapse of Wall Street in 2008, 2009. And certainly because it's got its fingers in so many areas, and with this multi-trillion dollar so-called "quantitative easing," it should have been audited every year. There is a Congressman from Texas who used to put in a bill every year to audit the Fed, and then Ron Paul took up the cudgels. The Congress should audit the Fed. The Fed resists it ferociously. It says we're an independent agency. Well, it has nothing to do with how you're spending money, and it doesn't matter it's not taxpayer money. In fact, it's worse, because it's special commercial interest money, bank money, and the various ways they get fees from handling check clearances and monetary policy, etc. So I'm all for it. It is a left right alliance in Congress, but it hasn't gone up to the leadership yet. That is, the Speaker and the Majority Leader have not endorsed auditing the Fed, nor has President Obama. But it's becoming a hotter issue. Maybe it'll become a big issue next year in the campaigns.

DAVID FELDMAN: A lot of people don't understand how the Fed works, including me. I've tried. Can you recommend a book that would explain it simply?

RALPH NADER: Yes. Secrets of the Temple by William Greider, who writes for *The Nation* magazine, and used to be with the Louisville Courier Journal. It was a best seller, and it came out years ago. It's still very relevant. Secrets of the Temple, William Greider, G-R-E-I-D-E-R.

DAVID FELDMAN: Great. Louise Delisle Perry writes to you about college costs. She says she asked you this question many years ago when you spoke at Bowdoin College in Maine. And she says you

didn't answer the question. What is your answer to this issue now about college debt and the high cost of going to college?

RALPH NADER: Louise, you should have made me answer the question if I didn't answer the question. I think Elizabeth Warren has it right. If the banks can borrow money from the Treasury or the Federal Reserve for near zero interest, why can't the students get that same borrowing chance? Instead they're paying six percent interest, which is outrageous, and some of the old Sallie Mae loans are up to nine percent, which is usurious gouging. So that first is you reduce the interest on existing student loans, which by the way, are \$1.3 trillion, even exceeding credit card loan totals, which staggers people in the western countries who don't have student loans. They get free tuition higher education in places like Germany and France. The second thing that needs to be done is to get behind Bernie Sanders' proposal, which is to make college, public university tuition, just like high school. You don't have tuition in high school, you shouldn't have tuition in college in public universities. You want to go to Harvard or private universities, that's another matter.

STEVE SKROVAN: And he proposes to pay for that with a transaction tax on Wall Street, correct?

RALPH NADER: Perfect. Wall Street collapsed the economy for the young generation. It's going to be very tough for them to get good paying jobs and all the problems that the Great Recession caused them. It's proper redemption to tax Wall Street transactions, a sales tax. I mean look, we all pay 6, 7, 8 percent sales tax when we go into a store in the U.S. for the most part.

DAVID FELDMAN: Well, are you afraid that if there's like a penny tax on these trades we'll see fewer and fewer speculation on the price of aluminum? Don't you fear that?

RALPH NADER: There should be less speculation. That's one of the benefits of a "Wall Street speculation tax," as we like to call it. It's called the "transaction tax." By the way, we had stock transaction tax going back to the Civil War to pay for the Civil War. There are countries like Japan and a

couple countries in Europe already have stock transaction tax. So it's nothing pioneering. But Congress, again, the majority are gridlocked on it. Look where they're getting their money. It goes back to our elections are up for sale. And we always have to ask members of Congress who are running in our districts, they come back to campaign, you ask them, what are you doing to shift power, Senator or Representative, from the few to us as taxpayers, workers, consumers and patients and shareholders? You know, that question is never asked. I did a column, you can get it on Nader.org right away. You can get on the list, it's free. Get my column every week, seven minutes of agitation, folks. And I wrote a very clear column a couple weeks ago. The only question reporters never ask candidates for public office: What is it? "How are you going to shift power from the few to the many since we the people are sovereign in our capacity as voters, consumers, taxpayers, workers and savers? How?" They'll be dumbfounded. You send them back to the books. You make them think a bit. And it's a left/right question. Everybody knows powerless people is not the best way to live.

STEVE SKROVAN: And that's our show. Thank you for your questions. Ralph, thank you for sort of a progress report on the year. We've got a whole new year ahead of us. A transcript of this episode will be posted on RalphNaderRadioHour.com.

DAVID FELDMAN: For Ralph's weekly blog, go to Nader.org.

STEVE SKROVAN: For more from Russell Mohkiber, go to CorporateCrimeReporter.com.

DAVID FELDMAN: Remember to visit the country's only law museum, the American Museum of Tort Law in Winsted, Connecticut. For more information, go to TortMuseum.org.

STEVE SKROVAN: The producers of the Ralph Nader Radio Hour are Jimmy Lee Wert and Matthew Marran.

DAVID FELDMAN: Join us next week when our guest will be Anna Myers, the Executive Director of the Government Accountability Project: and we'll also be talking about the United Nations with William Miller from the Center for Media and Peace Initiatives. Until then, Ralph?

RALPH NADER: Thank you very much David, Steve. Wish you a Happy New Year, and wish our listeners a civically productive New Year. There's no other way in a democracy.