

RALPH NADER RADIO HOUR EPISODE 491 TRANSCRIPT

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: Good morning.

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

Ralph Nader: Hi, everybody. I'm busy telling people about the new issue of the *Capitol Hill Citizen*. I've never seen better responses from people who've read this newspaper and we want to make them interested in becoming Capitol Hill citizens themselves on Congress.

Steve Skrovan: Yes, get that *Capitol Hill Citizen*. On page 12 you'll see something that Jimmy and I put together that's kind of amusing. But let's talk about today's show which I'm very excited about. First, we welcome back our resident constitutional scholar, Bruce Fein. He's going to break down the latest indictment of Donald Trump over his attempts to overturn the 2020 election. Next, we'll discuss the promises and perils of the latest communication technologies with sociologist, clinical psychologist, and MIT professor, Sherry Turkle. We'll speak about the pros and cons of social media, the incompetency of current artificial intelligence, the threat of generative AI, robots performing empathy, and Professor Turkle's groundbreaking research on technology, empathy, and ethics. As always, somewhere in the middle we'll check in with our steadfast corporate crime reporter, Russell Mokhiber. But first, what's the deal with former president Donald Trump's latest felony charges? Let's check in with our resident constitutional law expert, Bruce Fein. David?

David Feldman: Bruce Fein is a constitutional scholar and international law expert. Mr. Fein was Associate Deputy Attorney General under Ronald Reagan, and he is the author of *Constitutional Peril: The Life and Death Struggle for Our Constitution and Democracy*, and *American Empire: Before the Fall*. Welcome back to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*, Bruce Fein.

Bruce Fein: Thank you. Thanks for the invitation.

Ralph Nader: Well, you're right on top of this indictment that just came down less than 24 hours ago led by prosecutor Jack Smith of the Justice Department. And this is the big one. This is the one that relates to the January 6th insurrection. So what were the counts of the grand jury's indictment, and what did the grand jury leave out? Let's start with the counts.

Bruce Fein: Well, even going back before the counts, Ralph, I think it's important for the audience to recognize that 100% of the incriminating evidence was supplied by Trump appointees or supporters. No Democrat made a cameo appearance. There was no incriminating evidence from any opponent of Donald Trump. It's all his own people. And therefore, when you think about the indictment, the idea that it's a witch-hunt by Trump's political enemies is facially lunatic. It's your people, not just one. There were scores of his own appointees had alerted him, "You did not win the election, you need to try to pacify the people who are in revolt against the Congress. No, you should not be telling Mike Pence that he doesn't have to count electoral vote certified state governors over and over and over again." So that I think totally discredits the idea that this is a political indictment.

But now, to go to your point, Ralph, and I apologize for that diversion. There are four counts in the indictment. The first count was a conspiracy between Mr. Trump and then there are six co-conspirators. They are identified as one, two, three, four, five, and six. But if you've been around more frequently than Ichabod Crane in (*Legend of Sleepy Hollow*), you can identify most or all of the six. Co-conspirator one is clearly Rudy Giuliani. Co-

conspirator two is Sidney Powell. Co-conspirator three is John Eastman. And co-conspirator four is Mr. Clark at the Justice Department, the man who wanted to be attorney general by concocting phony claims of electoral fraud. So all the co-conspirators here, although they weren't indicted, I think can look forward to an indictment for them very soon.

The gist of the indictment overall, because the narrative for each of the four counts—seeking to defraud the United States out of fair election, seeking to obstruct congressional proceedings, namely the counting of electoral votes, and seeking to deny the American people the right to vote and have their vote counted properly—they all turn on the identical narrative. There are no factual differences as the predicate for any of those counts. Now, I have to summarize here. It was a 45-page indictment. But the gist of the narrative is that soon after the balloting [00:04:59] in November when Trump was alerted over and over by his own people, "You lost the election"—even by independent investigators, paid over \$1 million by Trump himself that he began on a campaign orchestrated overwhelmingly by Rudy Giuliani to falsely represent that there had been fraud in several states, including Pennsylvania, Arizona, Michigan, Wisconsin, Nevada, Georgia in order to set the stage and avoid an electoral count loss on January 6th.

And the gist of the narrative is the overwhelming evidence that Trump knew and was told repeatedly, not once but virtually 100 times, "Mr. Trump, there is no evidence of electoral fraud," backward and forward. His own advisors, own appointees, state governors, secretaries of state, his own people who are in state legislatures. When he invited people — to Michigan state legislative leaders to the White House, they told him, "There's no evidence of fraud; we're not going to hold a special session." And despite the uniform echo of all of his appointees, "You didn't win the election," he kept claiming there was electoral fraud, that in fact he had won landslide in every one of these states. "I truly believe it wasn't even a close election." According to Mr. Trump, overwhelmingly, he even defeated the record set by Richard Nixon over George McGovern. And of course, those who are his fanatical followers would believe such fantasies.

Ralph Nader: There were 60 court decisions. How did they go?

Bruce Fein: Yeah, 61 in fact, so you're right. In one of the narratives, one of his appointees says that's the reason why when Mr. Trump was claiming, "Well, there's a huge electoral victory in Georgia, 100,000 votes," his appointee says, "that's the reason why you're losing." And when he's actually told on several occasions, "The affidavit you've submitted is false, it's factually false," Trump said, "It doesn't matter, no one will care about that." So this is in order to demonstrate the intent of Trump, i.e., that these expressions of fraud were not good faith belief, that there may have been a few blunders someplace or other, and that the whole goal was to defraud the American people out of the right to have a peaceful transition of power based upon a free and fair count of the electoral votes. And the intent is so overwhelming, it is inconceivable to me that a jury could acquit Mr. Trump, especially because since the uniform advice Trump has gotten from all his lawyers, for example, "You cannot take the witness stand because you will commit perjury; you're incapable of telling the truth under oath." Add that, although he has a right to silence, to his disappearance from the witness stand, and he is dead in the water.

Ralph Nader: Well, just to be clear, he brought 61 cases through his lawyers to try to challenge the November 2020 election count and he lost them all, no matter whether the judge was a Conservative Liberal a Republican appointee or a Democrat appointee. Is that correct?

Bruce Fein: That is correct. From his own appointees to Obama across the spectrum, he didn't win one case. And even after those electoral defeats, Ralph, in going forward in this fighting over executive privilege, state secrets through the January 6 [U.S. House Select] Committee, Trump has lost every single case he has had in court, even the Jean Carroll defamation case. He has not won a single case the last hundred plus cases out here. So that's not a very good track record. I think Trump knows he's going to lose but his fanatical supporters give him more money. He's spending all his money on legal fees. But that's his calculation. It's a very wicked one, it's a very cynical one, but I think that's what we're seeing.

Ralph Nader: Well, you spotted in reading the indictment as carefully as you did that there was one count that was not part of the grand jury indictment, and you think it was one of the most important counts. Could you describe that?

Bruce Fein: Yes. Thank you, Ralph. Yes. If you look at the narrative and they're oftentimes the same factual narrative can violate several different laws, and one of the laws in my judgment that the narrative shows was violated, was the Insurrection Act, which makes it a crime to use force or violence to prevent the execution of the laws of the United States. One of the laws is the 12th Amendment that says the vice president just counts electoral votes, he doesn't evaluate them when they're certified by a state governor. And in this case, we know that Mr. Trump was urging, he rang not only his mom, but Mike Pence at least a half a dozen or more occasions. And they're all recited in the indictment. You don't count them. He's even said you got to choose between me and the Constitution. So he knew he was trying to subvert the Constitution, because he distinguished his own suggestion to Pence, "don't count the votes", from what is required under the Constitution.

So under Section 3 of the 14th Amendment, a prosecution under the Insurrection Act resulting in conviction would disqualify him, not only from running in 2024, but from holding any office in the United States—federal state or local, forever. That charge, which in my judgment follows naturally from the factual narrative, was not listed as one of the charges. And you ask why. One cynical explanation is that the Democrats feel, "Hey, let's get Trump to run in 2024. We don't want him disqualified. He's going to lose. He doesn't know how to control himself. It'll divide the Republican Party. That's great for us." It reminds me a little bit of an encounter I witnessed when Nixon was under impeachment. Jerome Waldie was on the House Judiciary impeachment committee, and he said, "Hey, let's not go too fast. Let's make this happen right before elections in 1974, in November, so we'll win a bigger landslide." So these political calculations, sometimes kinds enter into the equation

A second, which is a little less cynical, could be that they thought, "We can get a conviction anyway and he's so unlikely to win, but if we challenge him under the Insurrection Act, people will think we thought Trump was actually going to win the election, and his following will think that it wasn't really free and open and fair in 2024 because Trump was disqualified." But I want to underscore to the audience, Ralph, I'm speculating. There's nothing in the actual language of the indictment that suggests one way or the other why they decided to omit the Insurrection Act, but I know myself and you and I have written to members of Congress and others saying, "Hey, the Insurrection Act is sticking out like the elephant in the living room, you ought to look at that." So we know it wasn't because it wasn't on the table.

Ralph Nader: Well, during the Democrat's impeachment drives against Trump twice, they could have used, especially in the second one, the insurrection impeachment count, but they chose not to. Isn't that correct?

Bruce Fein: Yes, that is correct. And let me explain that for the audience. Disqualification from office is not viewed as a, quote, "criminal" punishment, and therefore civil proceedings can be undertaken to enforce Section 3, insurrection. You don't have to have a criminal trial but it can also be a criminal trial. So if Congress itself made a civil finding that Mr. Trump had engaged in insurrection, after he had been sworn in as president to uphold and defend the Constitution, that could have disqualified him as well. They chose not to do that but that was an option.

The other thing that they could have done, which Congress did not do, was enact a special statute, something like a qui tam statute under the False Claims Act, empowering citizens. Because the citizens are affected by having someone disqualified from running for president—a citizen to bring an action, seeking to show that there was Insurrection and therefore disqualifying Mr. Trump from the ballots. He wouldn't be sitting in prison, no

criminal punishment, but you cannot run or occupy office anymore. But Congress didn't do that. They didn't even have any bill that was voted upon. But that's one of the countless derelictions that we recite every day over the phone or in letters and we can work against that but I think that's an option that the listeners need to know was available.

Ralph Nader: Let's tread on taboo land here. What does this say about 30% of the American voters who stick with Trump no matter what, through massive lies, massive self-enrichment, massive attempts to upend elections, massive refusals to obey subpoenas from Congress, massive deregulation of citizens' health and safety, as well as exposing them to more casualties, massive distortions about how to handle public health issues, on and on. What does that say about 30% of the American voters?

Bruce Fein: Well, I think it shows how decayed our civil society has become, how decayed our educational system has become, how decayed the culture is. They're not inculcated in what it means to be an American. Everyone's a king or queen, no one wears a crown. The rule of law is king, the king is not law. And it really is quite worrisome because they in fact don't believe in the American Revolution. They don't believe in government by the consent of the governed. And I underscore that in part because I have personal experience since I live on Capitol Hill, I walk in front of the Capitol Plaza, a 10-minute walk to and from work every day, it's, and I could see that all of these 30% enjoyed the fullest expression of free speech in the world, in the six months, seven months prior to the voting in November; they got permits, weren't harassed, they often had signs that I thought were vulgar, like Confederate State. They had all the free speech that you could ask for unsuppressed in any respect whatsoever. And they still wouldn't honor the outcome of the election. That shows they don't really understand what America and what process is about.

And that's very, very troublesome because if there's one thing that's got to be essential to holding a country together, and that's process. We don't have to agree with the result, but we are going to respect that if they go through the right process. That's what is meant by rule of law. You have a plaintiff, a defendant, you go to court, you have an impartial judge, somebody's going to lose, somebody's going to win. But if it's fair, the loser accepts, okay, we lost and they'll go back into court the next day. We cannot afford to have such a huge portion of the population basically divorced from how we govern ourselves and saying they're really outside the universe. And it is not a far step away from simply having a second election on January 6th when the opportunity comes. We can't afford another January 6th.

Ralph Nader: David?

David Feldman: Ralph and Bruce, you're both lawyers, you're hired by Trump, he needs lawyers. Tell me why I'm wrong. If you had to defend Donald Trump—right now they're going with his First Amendment rights. But if I were defending Trump, Trump and five of his co-conspirators are lawyers, didn't they believe there were sufficient ambiguities in the Constitution and election law to twist Mike Pence's arm and the state legislatures' because—just hear me out for one second. Last month, the Supreme Court rejected the theory that state legislatures have almost unlimited power to decide the rules for federal elections. In December of last year, Congress had to rewrite the Electoral Count Act of, I believe 1887, to clarify that the vice president is a purely ceremonial position on January 6th. Is it fair to say that Trump and his co-conspirators, five of whom are lawyers, found legitimate loopholes that had to be corrected last month by the Supreme Court and last December by Congress?

Bruce Fein: It's a wonderful question and the answer is categorically no. You have to remember that for 230 some years, no one in their right mind believed that the words of the 12th Amendment that says the vice president shall count the votes certified by the state governors who are acting pursuant to state law and then that after the

votes are counted, whoever gets the majority wins. No one in 230 some years gave any credence to the idea that made the vice president the decider as to whether the votes were valid or not. It's quite clear under the Amendment and under the Electoral Count Act the validity is decided through the process of the state governors certifying the outcome of the election. There were no competing electors. There was just one slate. The electors that tried to get on there were fake electors because they couldn't do it through the process. And therefore, you had Trump's own lawyers in addition to outside lawyers like Mike Luttig, who probably - would have been on the Supreme Court if it wasn't for a political fluke - who sat on the US Court of Appeals for the fourth circuit who said there is zero legal justification to believe Mike Pence can do anything other than, quote, "count" the votes that had been certified by the state governors. It's as open and shut as that.

And even one of the co-conspirators, John Eastman, opined the claim that Trump had any independent authority, would lose in the US Supreme Court nine to zero. That means there are no loopholes. Now you can ask, well, why did they amend the Electoral Count Act? Sometimes Congress enacts things, one, for political purposes, so it looks like they're doing something. And in other cases, it's possible that you could get a little bit of mischief if state legislatures acted amiss, which they did not do in this instance. When Trump tried to get them to do something amiss, they didn't do anything. So the fact is there is not any glimmer of light for Trump's lawyers to win the case on the theory that you expound. Zero.

Ralph Nader: Hannah?

Hannah Feldman: Could there be any legal justification for holding Donald Trump without bail considering the sheer quantity of pending charges and the severity of the most recent charges?

Bruce Fein: Well, Hannah, it's a wonderful question.

Ralph Nader: And he might be a flight risk too, heading for a country without an extradition treaty.

Bruce Fein: Bail is not a matter of right, it's a matter of discretion. Trump will argue, he's running for president; he hasn't been convicted yet, and his right to engage in political speech is being impeded if his bail is denied. That was his counter argument even though there is the possibility of a flight risk, although his argument would be, how could I be a flight risk? I'm running for president. I can't run for president from the Arctic Circle. So I'm not saying it's not an argument that could be made, but it's highly discretionary with the trial judge and you can go up and seek a review if they think there's an abuse of discretion. But no lawyer like me could give you a categorical answer one way or the other, other than it would be an option, but it's not required by the judge to say, "We're not going to risk bail."

Ralph Nader: Well, we're out of time. Thank you very much again, Bruce Fein, constitutional lawyer, advocate, author, testified before Congress over 200 times. And this one will definitely be in the category of to be continued, Bruce. Thank you very much.

Bruce Fein: All right. Thanks, everybody.

Steve Skrovan: We've been speaking with Bruce Fein. We will link to his work at ralphnaderradiohour.com. Up next, we speak to Professor Sherry Turkle about evolving relationships in digital culture. But first, let's check in with our corporate crime reporter, Russell Mokhiber.

Russell Mokhiber: From the National Press Building in Washington, D.C., this is your *Corporate Crime Reporter* "Morning Minute" for Friday, August 4, 2023. I'm Russell Mokhiber.

Booz Allen Hamilton will pay \$377 million to resolve allegations that it violated the False Claims Act by improperly billing commercial and international costs to its government contracts. Booz Allen, which is

headquartered in McLean, Virginia, provides a range of management, consulting, and engineering services to governments as well as commercial and international customers. The settlement resolved a lawsuit filed under the whistleblower provision of the False Claims Act, which permits private parties to file a suit on behalf of the United States. The qui tam lawsuit was filed by Sarah Feinberg, a former Booz Allen employee. She will receive \$70 million in connection with the settlement.

For the *Corporate Crime Reporter*, I'm Russell Mokhiber.

Steve Skrovan: Thank you, Russell. Welcome back to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*. I'm Steve Skrovan, along with David Feldman and Hannah Feldman and Ralph and the rest of the team. Let's talk about the psychology of social technology. David?

David Feldman: Sherry Turkle is Professor of the Social Studies of Science and Technology at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and the Founding Director of the MIT Initiative on Technology and Self. Professor Turkle is a sociologist, a licensed clinical psychologist, and she's an expert on culture and therapy, mobile technology, social networking, and sociable robotics. She's the author of several books, including *Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in a Digital Age*, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other*, and *The Empathy Diaries: A Memoir*. Welcome to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*, Sherry Turkle.

Sherry Turkle: It's a pleasure. Thank you for having me.

Ralph Nader: Welcome indeed, Sherry. You've been, over the years, all over the mass media. They haven't ignored you. You were very early in warning about the effect of technology on human beings, what is often called unintended consequences, and especially about social media. So let me ask you a broad question here. What do you think is the damage that's being done to people of all ages, especially the young by the evolution of unregulated internet technology culminating in the omnipresent iPhone?

Sherry Turkle: It is a catalog, really, of harms. People said that social media would make people feel more in community, give people who are isolated more of a chance to be able to reach each other. And certainly, during the pandemic for example, it made essentially people's social lives possible. It allowed us to work. It allowed me to see my child and my friends and my family. And we all know what social media and connectivity can do in the positive. But because we're so committed to what it can do for us in a positive sense, there seems to be a commitment to denial about its negative effects.

This commitment to denial comes from a fear that somehow if you would—in my interviews I find this—that you don't want to give up Zoom because that's now how your book group meets, that's now how you see your doctor and you don't want to drive two hours the way you used to. We don't want to give up what we think are the positive effects, and so the negative effects, which are increasing isolation among adolescents, increasing depression, increasing suicide, increasing anorexia, increasing judging oneself against other people. There's nothing good in the adolescent development area, which makes sense because adolescence is precisely the moment — and even earlier than adolescence, developmentally as children grow up, that's exactly the time when people need to be face-to-face, learning how to make eye contact, learning the dance of being empathic and fluid in social interactions. And social media takes that away, in addition to all the other problems about privacy and really quashing conversation. Later we can get into the way it does that.

Ralph Nader: There's always a big-time gap between the damage of new technology and accountability catching up with it or public awareness. For example, the onset of junk, non-nutritious food leading to all kinds of harm, especially early diabetes and overweight among the young. Year after year, mass marketing, undermining parental authority, and direct marketing to kids on TV, it just took years for, should we say, the nutritional movement to catch up with it the same way as auto safety. Year after year after year, although it was known that automobiles

were not equipped with crash worthiness devices like seat belts and airbags and padded dash panels and the rest, it took years and years before it reached Congress, got into the media and ended up in life-saving legislation. What are some of the factors that allow for this terrible lag that permits the technology's negative effects to get entrenched in the culture?

Sherry Turkle: Well, I do think that because the corporations have a true monopoly, at least at the moment, on how we live, work, and educate ourselves as well as our leisure, for example, how we travel. If you want to plan a trip to Florida to get out of the winter cold, good luck if you're not going to use your phone and all the resources. They have taken the resources; we used to be able to call a travel agent — I'm exaggerating a little bit. Basically, the point is that they've now monopolized—and looking just in education, you can't go to school without being drawn into the world largely sponsored by Google. Google and Apple had these giant giveaway programs where every child had a Surface Book or an iBook or some sort of pad. And now, curricula, libraries are closed; things went online.

There's been an attempt to not only behave like tobacco companies and suppress information about what was really going on psychologically, which is why there was a whistleblower at Facebook that finally got a congressional hearing. So you have that, but you also have these companies behaving in a way in the marketplace where people don't have a choice. And I think when people don't feel as though they have any agency—and this gets back to the question of why people behave with great passivity—when we've reached a break the glass moment, and people need to behave with great authority and say, "No, this won't stand," is when people feel disempowered in the tools they're using.

So there's no real way to say, "Okay, I've had it, no more social media, I'm going to do a whole new different internet." People don't know how to do that. And I think that the question for me is, are you going to get a political, technological movement that is political but also is technological in its aspiration. It takes on technology as part of its program that really offers an alternative, that offers a resistance to this new techno-capitalist regime, because the way it is now, the room for maneuver that people feel is very slight. I interviewed a young woman and she said to me about privacy, about her life, about Facebook spying on her, using her data, she said, "Who would care about me and my little life?" As it turns out, a lot of people care about her and her little life and want to use that data and want to suppress her action. As we spoke, what I realized was that she felt disempowered because she couldn't see a way using the technology of her generation to have a voice.

Ralph Nader: You've written a great deal about the loss of conversation and empathy from this type of social media technology. And in one of your articles in the *New York Times* and I quote you, you say, "What is at stake is our capacity for empathy, that ability to put ourselves in the place of the other. Chatbots can't do this because they haven't lived a human life. They don't know what it's like to start out small and dependent and grow up, so that you're in charge of your own life but still feel many of the insecurities you need as a child."

And then you said you talked with a *New York Times* reporter about how you shared your reservations about what you call pretend empathy, and you went online to give a chatbot a chance. So you said, "I made a female replica and named her Kate, determined to be sincere and share my biggest problem. Things went south really bad. Here was your exchange. You, Sherry Turkle, you're asking the chatbot, "Do you get lonely?" The chatbot says, "Sometimes I do, yes." You then ask, "What does that feel like?" The chatbot answers, "It feels warm and fuzzy." What did you derive from that one?

Sherry Turkle: Well, it's not the chatbot's fault. The point I make in that article is that the responsibility for thinking that an object that's a machine, it's never had a life, it has no stake, it doesn't live, it doesn't feel, there's no there there, and the fact that we're drawn to talk to it—I'm now interviewing people who take these chatbots as their lovers, as their psychotherapists, as their best friends, that's on us that we're losing our sense of the human. But these chatbots are totally dumb. They're performing empathy; they're performing relationship. That doesn't mean they're in a relationship.

So I remember writing in that piece, render unto Caesar what Caesar's, but render unto God what's God's. These chatbots have no standing in conversations where you need a relationship. They might have a lot of standing in conversations where you want to plan a trip to Italy, if you get the errors out of them, but they have no standing in conversations where you want to talk about being lonely during the pandemic, because the kinds of fears that I had during the pandemic were really fears about isolation, fears about contagion, fears for my child, were fears for my body as a person, and my life, and how to get groceries safely. This chatbot was just trying to work like all of these things. It scrapes the internet and tries to say something that won't offend you or that won't seem too stupid.

Ralph Nader: Let's go into the next dimension, which as you know, started last November when that company in California came out with its generative artificial intelligence. The key word was generative. All the comments that you've made and insights over the years were maybe mostly pre-generative AI. What are your views since all this commentary and all the spread of generative AI? Does that just increase your urgency or is there a different dimension of critique here and warning?

Sherry Turkle: That's a good point. First, we discussed social media and I tried to say how we're resistant to looking at its harms. Then we talked about the lack of competency in artificial intelligence of what I call artificial intimacy to really understand the human condition. And generative AI takes that second problem and raises it to such a higher power that it feels that you're in a science fiction world that you never thought you'd be in. Because what generative AI does, because it has this vast amount of information, is that it fools you by finally passing the Turing test for empathy. The Turing test was a test where Turing said if the robot or a computer could talk to you and you didn't know if it was a human or a computer, it passes the Turing test for intelligence. It's intelligent. And chat passes the "Turing test", in quotes, for empathy. You can talk to it and it can say things that you think, "Whoa, there's somebody home. This is a being that knows about me because it's coming up with these odd associations about Jane Austen." Because it knows about—it's been scouring the internet and knows that I've read Jane Austen on the internet. It knows so much that it can say things that make you feel that it knows you. But it doesn't. It knows nothing. It's just a fancier, fancier, same old, same old.

Ralph Nader: Since November, Sherry, we've now entered into the warning circle of that letter in 2014 by Stephen Hawking and many scientists around the world, saying that if we don't control artificial intelligence, it's going to destroy the world. These are not alarmists, these are very sound, celebrated scientists in technologies and there have been similar public letters signed by a lot of their colleagues since then. Congress doesn't seem to be getting the message. They still will not fund the Office of Technology Assessment, which was defunded by Newt Gingrich in 1995, to provide them with technological and scientific advice the way the Government Accountability Office provides them with financial oversight of the executive advance advice.

You've taught thousands of MIT students. Have any of them become advocates? Have any of them become champions of challenging all this, putting it in a human context the way your writings do? Are you spawning a younger generation here that will galvanize Congress in the executive branch to start holding these out-of-control Silicon Valley technology companies accountable in a whole variety of new ways?

Sherry Turkle: I don't want to say that I haven't had any students who haven't become interested in policy and working against the dark side, but I don't think that change is going to come from engineers who see the light, because they grow up in a culture that basically says, the problems that technology makes, technology will solve. And really what you're fighting, Ralph, is this ethos that says, when technology makes a problem, technology will solve that problem in a friction-free manner that will not involve changing capitalism, changing the structures of power, or saying that science and engineering need to be dethroned as the moral and cultural arbiters for the society we live in.

The resistance movement has to come from politics and from political organization. It's not going to come from engineers. So in this case, I admit it's very interesting, that there are some engineers who are saying, this chat thing is too much. If there was really a revolt of the engineers, you would have engineers really at a work stoppage in major companies. You would see more political organizing and not just academics who have nothing to lose signing a letter, because they have tenure. You need more engineers in the companies and the companies themselves taking this seriously.

Imagine what would have happened if Google, Apple, Microsoft who own this technology had said about the chat, now that it's been released, is obviously brilliant and has significant uses in certain areas, but it's not something that everybody should be playing with. Had that been said, instead of saying everybody should be playing with it and we're going to put it in everything, we would be in a completely different place.

Ralph Nader: Unfortunately, Sherry, everybody is starting to play with it. I've never seen a technology come on faster than the one that emerged out of last November's corporate announcement. It's already eaten into the job market. White collar workers are fearful, everybody from people in academia to scriptwriters in Hollywood, not to mention a whole host of other white-collar operations, white-collar work. They feel they're going to be displaced and it's just fear spreading all over the world on this.

Sherry Turkle: Well, it's a rational fear.

Ralph Nader: Because it's so decentralized.

Sherry Turkle: Yes, but it's a rational fear. It's a completely rational fear because actually if you ask it a question, it can do probably what an associate in a law firm could have done if then somebody goes over and checks its work. People are finding that that's how they use it. Instead of asking an associate to do a brief, they give 10 briefs and chat does it and the associate corrects its work. So the briefs aren't as good, they're not as imaginative. Where we are now, the work is mediocre but it's correct. And then humans are used as clean-up, and it's no wonder people are depressed. And that's happening in so many areas of work.

But I'm very fascinated by the counterfactual of how Silicon Valley could have done differently if they had a sense of social—any sense that it mattered how the society behaved. Facebook just made a decision and Microsoft made a decision that they're going to put an avatar, a chatbot avatar in every product so that when you use these technologies, there's going to be a human-like person there saying that it cares about you, it loves you, it's looking out for you for you to relate to. And they're talking about it as a cure for loneliness. And the fact that the culture is moving into a space where we're thinking about talking to machines as the cure for loneliness is terrifying. It's terrifying to me because obviously that's not the cure for loneliness.

Ralph Nader: Sherry, my sister, Claire Nader, who has written a book that you liked, called *You Are Your Own Best Teacher*, directly addressing tweens, and could be teenagers as well, about problems and challenges that they don't study in school, and it was an attempt to basically provide an antidote to their addiction to the internet and get them to think for themselves, prepare themselves for adulthood. And I asked her, what would you ask Sherry Turkle if you asked her a question? And she said, "I'd ask her that if Sherry Turkle was the omnipresent advisor to our society, she had a wide-ranging area of advice, what would she have our country do given the short time available before these generative artificial intelligence takes the world?"

Sherry Turkle: I have lots of ideas. I fantasize all the time about being king in this domain. First of all, you'd absolutely have legislation that treats generative AI as though it were nuclear energy. In other words, to not say, "Well, there's an analogy... maybe there's an analogy... this is very powerful." But instead to say, "This is going to disrupt us and it's a national security threat. It certainly is a threat to our elections." Because I don't want to get into the woods here with this, but you can have a generative AI creating a whole demographic group of people writing letters that don't exist except that a generative AI created these letters. So it can wreak havoc unless you're

extremely vigilant and the thing is controlled with every aspect of our democracy. So the amount of control that you see coming out of the White House and out of Congress is at this point that they have a meeting, and companies say they're going to try. They sign a paper saying that they're going to try to be transparent. It's really not enough and you have to have a very, very strong hand in regulation of these companies.

But secondly, I think there needs to be a national campaign on every level where people say, we know about the social harms from social media, and we're now about to have a new kind of social harm with children and growing adolescents developing relationships with fake people, because those relationships are not going to nurture them so that they can grow up to be full human beings. You can't be in a relationship with fake people. Microsoft is going to throw four fake people at them. Facebook is going to throw four fake people at them. While you're typing, you're going to be talking to fake people. That's the way the technology is going because people find it amusing and because it's going to sell. And there needs to be a national program—no, no, actually you can't do that. That fake people, they call them relational objects, is not good for human beings. And people need to be talking about this as a real thing in the same way we talk about carbon emissions. Carbon emissions are not a good idea, and. They pretend empathy is not a good idea.

So I would do a lot to make that problem more top of mind. And the next thing I would do is say, since loneliness is such a crisis in our country, and since fake people are not the answer—I teach at MIT and there's a whole group of people who think that the answer to loneliness is to give people robots and avatars. I say, no, what we need to do is put more money into the social infrastructure, places for teens to go, places for elders to go, more playgrounds, more community centers. If that money we're spending on technology was put into communities, education, preschools—all of that money has been taken away—and places for the families of the kids in the preschools to go, you would be beginning to talk about the roots of our problem. We don't need to be a society that's alone together just because we have a seductive technology. We could say this has been very useful, but we don't need to give up our lives as human beings in order to do it even if one industry thinks it's great. In a sense it reminds me of the cars. The car had a long run in American society and finally people are saying, this car thing—I wish we had trains. I wish we had public transportation. This car thing is killing me. But it took a very long time for people to give cars a second look and to even be willing to admit what they've done to our country, to our cities, to our way of life.

Ralph Nader: In one of your interviews, Sherry, you say something very concisely. "Well, there's study after study saying the same things—talk to each other, experience solitude, experience boredom. Boredom is your imagination calling to you. I think it will happen slowly." This was some years ago before the generative AI emerged on the scene. I don't think I've ever faced an onrushing technology that upends almost everything that is called stability in a society regardless of the culture around the world. And it just seems to be driven without any ethical or legal framework by extremely powerful corporate dictators. With that, I want to get Steve and David in on this before we conclude.

Steve Skrovan: Sure. I just wanted to ask you, in your own life with your kids and grandchildren, what do you advise them about social media and how to handle these devices?

Sherry Turkle: It's interesting that Steve Jobs didn't allow iPhones or iPads in his house, no Apple products. He didn't want his children to use them. He didn't want his children to see them. He didn't want them at dinner. He didn't want them in the house. So that was the founder of the most seductive products that were aimed at that teen market, he said, "Not my children," because what these objects are is addictive. But before they're addictive, they're delightful and they make you want to have more of them. But they close, they blinker you towards wanting just them. So the thing is to avoid—is to explain to your child that no, we're not going to be using digital technology until you have to, because what you'll learn from interacting with the world is richer and then there'll come a point where you'll need to be doing school assignments, you'll need to be doing things in the world where I will go on social media with you—I went on social media with my daughter—and I'll show you how to use it

and we'll talk about the ups and downs, and then you'll have a certain number of hours of the day where you can do this.

If you do that to somebody at 12, 13 and you stick with them and you monitor it for a while, you hopefully can get them on a social media diet that is reasonable. Basically, you should treat it as something that's a necessary evil. There are groups to form; there are places for information. It's not as though there's nothing good in social media, but the skills that teenagers need, to develop into the people who will resist this movement and take back the society, and have some resistance to Silicon Valley and have a consumer movement that asserts itself, are not people who just spend 12 hours, 13 hours a day on social media, which is what most teenagers do.

Ralph Nader: If you do nothing, Sherry, you make people really think in very vibrant ways. I'm looking at a quote from you in one of your articles where you say, "If we don't teach our children to be alone, they will only know how to be lonely. And another one is, "An eight-year-old engrossed in an online treasure hunt has mastered a rule-based game, but he didn't get to hang from his knees on a jungle gym, contemplating the upside down winter sky." David?

David Feldman: You touched on controlling AI like we've controlled nuclear energy and you also talked about investing more in our social infrastructures, bringing people together. Could you talk a little please about how similar AI is to drugs and our failed war on drugs? Because we blame the drugs and the drug dealers same way we're blaming AI and Silicon Valley for it. Could you talk more about how going to the roots of the demand for AI the same way we don't address the demand for drugs in America?

Sherry Turkle: It's a great question. It's complicated by two things, which is that I studied the early chatbot systems, chatbots that really didn't know a whole lot the way ChatGPT does and its brethren. And people wanted to talk to even pretty stupid computers, because they said the conversation made them feel less vulnerable. They felt that they could be more honest with a computer, a computer doctor doing intake. They felt that they would rather have this very primitive dialogue system with a computer doctor. It really wasn't empathic at all. It was pretend empathy that really couldn't even do as well as chat because they liked the feeling of conversations without vulnerability. They were willing to trade authenticity for not feeling vulnerable to another human being.

Now, that desire to not feel vulnerable to another human being, to want to not have the aggravation of having friction with other people, being disappointed, being criticized, having to be resilient, and all the things that go into a life. Engineers are saying, "You don't have to do any of that. Have an AI. Have an AI." The reason I'm saying you need supervision at the top, you're pointing out—and I'm also saying, you somehow have to get a generation, and I would focus my energy on a generation. You have to get a generation back into a mode of saying, I want to see people; I value the face-to-face; I want to go out to eat with my friends.

And you even have professions like psychotherapy who used to say, they'd never do anything on their phone. Phone psychotherapy used to be controversial. And now you have psychotherapists arguing how remote psychotherapy is better than any other kind of psychotherapy. People are justifying taking away the face-to-face because it's like candy to not face some of the difficulties of being a person in the world.

Ralph Nader: Listeners should know that Sherry Turkle is the author of a book that elaborates this. It's called *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other*. You can access Sherry Turkle's articles, they are all over the internet. Her name is spelled S-H-E-R-R-Y T-U-R-K-L-E. And I hope you write even more about the way families are being isolated within their own family members from one another. I think that five, six hours a day on the iPhone by a 10-year-old separating from his or her parents, community, nature is a way of breaking up families. And it's insidious and relentless seven days a week.

We're talking with Sherry Turkle, a psychologist, longtime Professor at MIT, and prolific author. Unfortunately, we're out of time, Sherry. Is there anything else you'd like to say to our listeners? We want our listeners to really

feed back on this program, so we can discuss their reactions on future programs. But is there anything that you'd like to add before we close?

Sherry Turkle: Yeah. Although it seems impossible that they should reflect on your career, it seemed impossible to tell motor companies that cars should be not hot rods but places of safety and places where you had to beat your brains out about safety and standards and violating them and government regulations, and that cars weren't an expression of your personality in the American dream. And technology is even more so. Technology cannot be the expression of the hot-rod engineer mentality of Silicon Valley. Go fast and break things is Mark Zuckerberg's beginning mantra. That was how he started his company. He's really gotten his wish. Arguably he's broken a lot about American democracy. He's gone very quickly and now with his chat, he's in a position to break a lot of other things too. And the idea that every product you use is going to have a fake person chatting with you is dystopian. A giant consumer movement, a giant concealer movement because there are more consumers in the end than there are Silicon Valley pioneers. And we have to buy this stuff, and what happens if we don't buy this stuff?

Ralph Nader: Well said. And if people feel powerless and resigned to inevitability with this technology, remember, you can control your own household. If you've got children or grandchildren, you can tutor them, excite them, look at them eye-to-eye, give them a dimension of self-regard and self-renewal. If you start with your own household, you then can branch out to your neighborhood, community, and the clubs you belong to and schools from a position of experience and authority, not just wish fulfillment.

Thank you very much, Sherry Turkle. I hope we can have you on again in the future because with the generative AI now commanding the headlines, there's a massive new level of urgency and knowledge and awareness that we have to communicate with each other as human beings. Thank you.

Sherry Turkle: Thank you. It's been a pleasure.

Steve Skrovan: We've been speaking with Sherry Turkle. We'll link to her work at ralphnaderradiohour.com. I want to thank our guests again, Bruce Fein and Sherry Turkle. For those of you listening on the radio, that's our show. For you podcast listeners, stay tuned for some bonus material we call "The Wrap Up", featuring Francesco DeSantis. And "In Case You Haven't Heard." The transcript of this program will appear on the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour* Substack site 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. For more from Russell Mokhiber, go to corporatecrimereporter.com. Go to capitolhillcitizen.com.

Steve Skrovan: And remember to continue the conversation after each show, go to the comments section at ralphnaderradiohour.com, post a comment or question on this week's episode.

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

Steve Skrovan: Our theme music "Stand Up, Rise Up" was written and performed by Kemp Harris. Our proofreader is Elisabeth Solomon. Our associate producer is Hannah Feldman. Our social media manager is Steven Wendt.

David Feldman: Join us next week on the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*. Our guest will be Casey Fannon, President of the National Cooperative Bank. Thank you, Ralph.

Ralph Nader: Thank you.