

## RALPH NADER RADIO HOUR EP 474 TRANSCRIPT

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

**David Feldman:** Hello. We have exciting news for our listeners.

**Steve Skrovan:** We do. And it involves slipping and falling, which we as comedians think is funny, but for most people who do it, not so much. Wednesday, April 12th, 2:30 p.m. Eastern, we're going to be partnering with the American Museum of Tort Law to bring you a conversation with slip, trip and fall expert and author, Russell Kendzior. So go to [ralphnaderadiohour.com](http://ralphnaderadiohour.com) to sign up to be in our live Zoom audience with me David and Ralph and Hannah and the whole gang. How about that, David?

**David Feldman:** And you get to meet Ralph. And if you so wish, you can raise your hand and ask questions and possibly be heard on the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*.

**Steve Skrovan:** You are correct, sir.

**David Feldman:** Or you can just watch how the sausage is made.

**Steve Skrovan:** That's right.

**David Feldman:** We're going to be making sausages, by the way.

**Steve Skrovan:** We will be. It'll be a cookout.

**David Feldman:** Yeah.

**Steve Skrovan:** And it'll be featuring the man of the hour, Ralph Nader. Hello, Ralph.

**Ralph Nader:** Hello, Steve, David, Hannah.

**Steve Skrovan:** Before we begin the proper featured part of the show, you had some comments about Medicaid expansion, especially in places like Mississippi. What's going on there?

**Ralph Nader:** Well, the eminently impeachable governor of Mississippi, Tate Reeves, has refused to take federal money available on the table, to expand Medicaid services for the poor people in Mississippi. As a result, rural hospitals are closing down. They relied heavily on the Medicaid money that came in during the pandemic and they're closing down. He knows all this. He knows there are people who are going to die, get sicker or more injured because they can't afford insurance to get medical services. On a bigger scale is an alarming headline in the *New York Times* on April 4th, quote, "Millions at risk of soon losing their Medicaid. Pandemic shield to end with an unwinding." Up to 15 million people in the next few weeks and months can be dropped from Medicaid because the deadline is up for continuing it, which started with the pandemic and COVID-19. State officials now are calling people to apologize that they no longer qualify for Medicaid. And there they are, all by their lonesome in the land of the free, home of the brave.

**Steve Skrovan:** Well, featured on today's show we're going to talk about the US military budget. Last month, the Pentagon released its budget request for fiscal year 2024 – \$842 billion. We can always count on Congress to be generous with the military. Last year they added 45 billion to the Pentagon's requested budget. So, we could be looking at the highest military budgets since World War II. That's according to our first guest, Quincy Institute senior research fellow, William Hartung. Mr. Hartung is an expert on the arms industry and the military budget. He'll join us to discuss our ever-ballooning military spending, where that money will go, whether we need all that money to defend ourselves and our allies, and who in Congress is fighting to reverse the trend.

Then we've been looking forward to this for a while, our second guess will be peace activist Cindy Sheehan. Twenty years ago on March 20, 2003, local time, the United States invaded Iraq. Nineteen years ago on April 4, 2004, US army specialist Casey Sheehan was killed in an ambush in Baghdad, while George W. Bush, Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld, the *New York Times* and the rest of the military-industrial complex urged the American people to support the troops by supporting the war in Iraq. Casey's mother, Cindy Sheehan, became a full-time anti-war activist. In the months following her son's death, she founded the group Gold Star Families for Peace, letting others know there were military families who believe the Iraq War was a crime. Her acts of protests and civil disobedience included camping out in front of George W. Bush's Texas ranch, protesting at the Washington Monument and the Pentagon, sit-ins at the White House, tax resistance, and running against war hawk Nancy Pelosi for her congressional seat. She came in second.

As always, somewhere in the middle we'll check in with our corporate crime reporter, Russell Mokhiber. But first, every day is Christmas at the Pentagon. David?

**David Feldman:** William Hartung is an expert on the arms industry, US military budget, and a senior research fellow at the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft. He is the author of *Prophets of War: Lockheed Martin and the Making of the Military-Industrial Complex*, and the co-editor of *Lessons from Iraq: Avoiding the Next War*. Welcome to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*, William Hartung.

**William Hartung:** Yes. Thanks for having me. Glad to be here.

**Ralph Nader:** Welcome again. First, I want to read a couple of paragraphs from a recent article to frame the new military budget that Biden sent up a few days ago to the Congress and what is likely to happen if we don't wake up to make it even bigger, thanks to senators like Jack Reed, Chairman of the Senate Armed Service Committee, Democrat from Rhode Island. Let me just quote, listeners, a few lines here so you can get some quantitative idea of what we're dealing with. Quote, "The Pentagon has released its budget request for fiscal year 2024. The figure for the Pentagon alone is a hefty \$842 billion. Total spending on national defense, including work on nuclear weapons at the Department of Energy, comes in at \$886 billion. The proposed budget is far more than is needed to provide an effective defense to the United States and its allies. Unfortunately," and this is key, listeners, "There's a danger that Congress will once again add tens of billions of dollars to the Pentagon's total, based on parochial financial interests rather than a careful assessment of what the United States needs to defend itself and its allies." And he gives the last two years' budget cycle. "Congress as a whole added 25 billion and 45 billion to the

Department of Defense budget and much of it went to weapons programs in key members of Congress congressional districts."

So Bill, this is pork barrel on steroids. I mean, when they start pouring more tax money, into the military budget from Capitol Hill, than the generals asked for, than Biden asked for. We're in a new dimension of an out-of-control, continually unaudited Pentagon budget. So when you say it's key members that get some of this pork, can you give us some ideas?

**William Hartung:** Well, for example, there's a representative from Maine, Jared Golden, who led the charge a couple of years ago for adding to the budget. And it's interesting, often they put Democrats forward as the ones pushing the amendments to increase beyond what the Pentagon asked for, because the Republicans are mostly already on board. But he added a \$2 billion ship built in Maine where he's based, that was not asked for by the Navy. Representative Elaine Luria upped that to \$4.7 billion to the shipbuilding budget and she and other members from Virginia have the Newport News Shipbuilding operation which builds aircraft carriers and attack submarines. They wouldn't even let them retire certain things. There's a ship called littoral combat ship, which is supposed to operate near the coasts of adversaries and supposed to be anti-submarine and anti-mine and could do none of those things. It was so bad that the Pentagon wanted to retire them well short of their service lives. And a business group from Jacksonville, where a lot of the repairs were done on the ship, worked with representatives from Florida and Virginia to block the Navy from retiring those ships. So not only do they add things, but they don't let the Pentagon shift gears when it wants to get rid of old things.

**Ralph Nader:** I thought that was one of the more powerful points in your article. The Pentagon wants to get rid of some of these weapon system programs, and the Congress says, "oh, no, we're going to continue them, because as they tell reporters, it's a jobs program; it creates jobs or it retains jobs that are already in shipyards and elsewhere." Of course, you can never get these members of Congress to understand that \$1 billion in civilian infrastructure investment in this country creates far more jobs than a highly capital-intensive billion dollars in another unneeded weapons system. Then you list some of them: the B-1 bomber, which is a real boondoggle from the get-go, F-22, F-15 combat aircraft, aerial refueling planes, C-130 and C40 transport aircraft, E-3 electronic warfare planes, HH-60W helicopters, and what you mentioned, the littoral combat ships or the LCSs. Pentagon wanted to mothball these, and the Congress said no. So, then it comes up to people like Jack Reed and others and here we go again. \$25 billion was added two years ago— \$45 billion to the defense budget last year, and Biden started at that level. So my question is, if they asked for so much more, why does the Biden administration start at that level instead of back to the level that they proposed to Congress in their prior year?

**William Hartung:** Well, it's all politics and money, of course. And given that Congress put that in there for their own pork barrel reasons, much of which was done by Democrats, they didn't want to fight that fight. But also, there's the perception, the way it's covered in the press, that if he had started at his level that he requested the year before and not the level with all that Congress added, he would have been slammed for, quote, "reducing" the Pentagon budget, when in fact it's gone up \$100 billion in the last two years, which is more than the military budget of any country in the world except China. So these are enormous sums, bigger by far than during Vietnam or Korea or the height of the Cold War. It's about \$400 billion more adjusted for inflation than when Eisenhower gave that Cross of Iron speech where he basically said money spent on the military is a theft from people's needs and essentially should only be done to the

degree absolutely necessary. So we're far from the world that he described, which was already skewed heavily towards the military over other needs.

**Ralph Nader:** Well, let's go over the people in Congress who got it right, who are trying to reduce the military budget, squeeze some of the vast waste, i.e., redundant military contracting cycles like F-35, which may end up costing about \$1 trillion, never mind the maintenance costs. Tell us about the few members of Congress who are sane in this situation and tell us whether there are any other groups around the country like Veterans for Peace or others who are lobbying Congress against the massive pro-bigger military contractors' lobby, which you say have over 800 full-time lobbyists on Capitol Hill, never mind back home. What's the opposition like?

**William Hartung:** Well, the key leaders in the House are Barbara Lee and Mark Pocan, and they have a bill called People Over Pentagon that would cut \$100 billion dollars as a beginning on getting a more sane level of military spending. And they're building support now, co-sponsors, and they're starting to get some traction. But they're still a minority but the idea is to build over time. So, groups like Public Citizen, my organization, the Quincy Institute, Friends Committee for National Legislation, a number of environmental groups like Friends of the Earth, and some immigration reform groups, have come together supporting this People Over Pentagon Act. So that's the nexus of the battle to bring it back down to reality.

**Ralph Nader:** Have any of these groups or members of Congress got public hearings in the House Armed Services or Senate Armed Services Committees? I mean, that's the next step.

**William Hartung:** There hasn't been any hearing of that sort. There was when Bernie Sanders ran the budget committee. He held a hearing on the Pentagon budget with critics including myself. But one hearing, given that the military leadership floods the Hill every year with dozens of hearings—they do hearings where they hear only from the heads of the weapons companies so it's an unequal debate in Congress; they don't really hear the critiques in detail in a hearing type setting.

**Ralph Nader:** Well, we're talking with William Hartung, arms and weapons expert for many years. He's now senior research fellow to Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft in Washington, D.C. I've often thought that the best investment in America in terms of what you put in and what you get back is the military weapons industries investment in members of Congress. For a pittance of campaign contributions, they get back billions and billions of dollars. Give us an example of what Congressman Mike Rogers, who is now, thanks to the Democrats' debacle last November, chair of the House Armed Services Committee, and Congressman Ken Calvert, who's the new chair of the Defense Appropriations Committee, are getting in campaign cash from corporations like Lockheed Martin and Boeing.

**William Hartung:** Yeah. It's interesting because they started giving them money in large quantities before they even took over the committees. They were laying down their bets that these were going to be the people. So, in the last cycle, Mike Rogers got over half a million dollars from the arms industry, and Ken Calvert, who runs the Defense Appropriations Subcommittee scored similarly. So those are the two big committees—Armed Services and Defense Appropriations. They have the most power over the size and shape of the Pentagon budget. Calvert got about \$450,000. So, they're just being flooded with money. But as you said, the whole industry gave \$82 million over a couple of cycles. In a given year, the top five alone

could get 150, 200 billion among them. One year Lockheed Martin got \$75 billion all by themselves, which is larger than the budget of the State Department and the Agency for International Development combined. So it's just a snapshot of what's wrong with our foreign policy and a lot of it is driven by this pork barrel politics and lobbying by these contractors.

**Ralph Nader:** Well, it's quite clear now that after the demise of the Soviet Union, the military-industrial complex is looking for more enemies, and Iran wasn't quite big enough with its 75 million people and a GDP smaller than Massachusetts. It didn't quite qualify. So, with the help of Hillary Clinton and her notorious speech at the Naval Academy in Annapolis, called The Pivot to Asia, now China is qualifying as the reason for Jack Reed and others to keep adding to the military budget beyond what the generals have asked for. You've made a very strong point and I want you to dwell on this. When you said that the problem with China is more political and economic than military. What did you mean by that?

**William Hartung:** Well, China's power relative to the United States really has to do with its relations with other countries, its investment in other countries, the growth of its economy. In military terms, it still lags far behind the United States. In spending, the United States spends about two and a half times what China spends. The US has more advanced military technology, a stronger Navy, many more nuclear weapons. If you look at the stockpiles, probably 13 times what China has. And the real issues that are being raised have to do with things close to China's shores. And of course Taiwan is the biggest of those. But Taiwan should be a diplomatic issue. It should be about maintaining the understanding that kept the peace there for going back to the 1970s which basically says the US will not recognize Taiwan as an independent country and China will agree not to integrate it by force. And there's other ancillary points but basically the Biden Administration has been engaging in rhetoric that makes it seem like they're no longer in support of that policy. And of course, you've had major leaders visit Taiwan, which just gives it kind of an aura of political endorsement by the American leadership. That's not going to be solved militarily. And in fact, if there were a war between the US and China, it would be an unprecedented disaster for all concerned, because they're both nuclear powers. The idea of sending large numbers of troops and ships and so forth thousands of miles away to fight China right in its front yard is not necessarily a winning proposition no matter how much money you spend.

So rather than ratcheting up this rhetoric about war with China, there was a general who basically said, "Oh yeah, we'll be at war with them by 2025." That kind of rhetoric is so irresponsible, but it does of course create an atmosphere of fear that makes it easier to sell large Pentagon budgets. And as war on terror was winding down with fewer troops in Afghanistan and Iraq, the Pentagon came forward with the national defense strategy that said, "Oh, it's about great powers now; it's about China." And Congress created a commission to critique the strategy in Congress. That commission said, "Oh, actually the Pentagon's understating it. We need to spend more than even they're proposing, 3% to 5% a year above inflation," which would put us over a trillion, which is where we're heading very soon at the rate we're going. But that commission was replete with people who were on the boards of military companies, had think tanks funded by military companies, consultants to the military industry. So the construction and hyping of the China threat had the fingerprints of the industry all over it. There's also anti-China ideologues in the mix but there's a strong financial conflict of interest element to it.

**Ralph Nader:** Well, as some military people have said, if you're preparing for war and you lace it with belligerent rhetoric, you're going to get a war. Do you think we're fueling an arms race? If the backers are all these defense contractors, who start saying, "Look at China, they've developed hypersonic missiles. We're behind." Here we go again with the missile gap. Do you think it's fueling an arms race with China?

**William Hartung:** Definitely. The whole hypersonic issue... these things may never work. Star Wars is a perfect example of overinvesting in technological fantasies, and I think we could be headed down that road again. But it's become the weapon du jour in Washington along with artificial intelligence and it's going to be a huge money sink. And of course, they're pointing to China's nuclear capabilities. They've built some more missile launch tubes although it's not clear they actually have missiles in them, and they for years had 200 or 300 long-range nuclear missiles versus thousands for the United States. And as the US has engaged in this across-the-board modernization, so-called, with new bombers, new intercontinental ballistic missiles, new sea launch nuclear arm cruise missiles, a whole new generation of nuclear warheads, and course the heated rhetoric about China, it looks like they're going to nudge up the size of their arsenal. But even if they tripled it, they would still be far behind the United States. But the industry and the kind of China hawks are pointing to that as yet another reason why we have to spend more. And of course, if you used about 100 nuclear weapons, you would end life as we know it. So the idea of building more, quote-unquote, "for defense" is absurd, but I think there's an understanding or a popular myth that more is better, which is an insurance policy when actually it could lead us down the road to disaster

**Ralph Nader:** Let's go into this section in one of your articles where you say Brown University's Costs of War Project has identified US counter-terror operations in at least 85 countries. U.S. forces and bases in over 100 countries. And we basically have a policy where the president can order our military anywhere, anytime, destroy, kill, never mind international law, national boundaries, and Republican and Democrat presidents have been reflecting that empire range of activity. Let me ask you something that I've been curious about. The Trident submarine, of which we have how many, built in Groton, Connecticut, could you tell our listeners how many cities could be wiped out by the multiple warheads of one Trident submarine, how long it would take to destroy those cities, and how many of the Trident submarines do we already have apart from the ones we're building?

**William Hartung:** Well, the multiple missiles with multiple warheads could destroy close to 200 cities and depending where at sea they're located, it would be a half-hour or less to bring that about.

**Ralph Nader:** In the whole world?

**William Hartung:** Yeah, worldwide. And there's on the order of 12 of them, so it's huge overkill. And there was a whole civil disobedience campaign against those submarines by people in the War Resisters League and other pacifist groups that should have gotten more attention than it did. Some of those people did time in jail. They were trying to raise the alarm about Kings Bay, Georgia where they based some of these submarines. And I think they were an inspiration to the peace movement. People felt like well, if they can take that kind of risk, I should be doing more. But it didn't break through on the national scale the way, say, civil disobedience during the

Vietnam War did. And it's because we don't have a mass peace movement at the moment even though we have a lot of good organizations working hard trying to turn that around.

**Ralph Nader:** Let's talk about one effort Congress has a pulse on. And you mentioned it. It's the Foreign Assistance Act, 502B. And you say that it's being invoked by Senators Chris Murphy – Democrat, Connecticut – Mike Lee – Republican, Utah – to require a State Department report on Saudi Arabia's human rights practices, which could serve as a step towards further action up to and including a cutoff of security assistance to Riyadh, and this will be the first time that provision has been invoked since 1976. This relates to US weapons being used by the Saudis in Yemen where there have been horrific casualties and one of the worst humanitarian crises in the world. Tell us a little about that.

**William Hartung:** Yes. Well, there's a number of arms control and human rights organizations that for a while have been saying this provision of law, 502B, should be invoked by the Congress to deal with some of these reckless, irresponsible, devastating arms transfers. And one of the groups is CIVIC, which works on issues of protecting civilians in conflict. And so, it ends up this provision, 502B, had not been used since the '70s. So, Congress had never really taken advantage of it. But Senators Murphy and Lee were persuaded that this was one way at the problem. And part of it was congressional frustration with the Biden Administration, which had said it was going to take a tough line on the Saudis. When he ran for president, Biden called the Saudis a pariah. On his first foreign policy speech, he said he was going to stop support for offensive operations in Yemen. When they sided with Russia on oil prices, he said there would be consequences and there were none. He did stop one sale of precision-guided bombs, but he made some arms sales to the Saudis.

So members of Congress, who for years, have been looking to cut off arms to Saudi Arabia because of things like what it's done in Yemen as well as how it treats its own population and crimes like the murder of the journalist Jamal Khashoggi. Congress was looking for a tool to try to impose some consequences on the Saudis. And so this is the tool that they're employing at the moment. And once this report comes in, they have the option of restricting some or all of US arms sales to Saudi Arabia. And it's kind of a follow-on. There have been efforts in the last few years to use the War Powers Resolution to cut off US military support for Saudi Arabia and that won in both Houses when Trump was president, but he then vetoed it. And there hasn't been a successful vote during the Biden administration. So this is another way at the problem, using an existing tool that was sort of just lying there ready for Congress. And a couple of members finally picking up and running with it.

**Ralph Nader:** The same federal law applies to the Israeli government, which is that no weapons sales or military assistance can go to a government that uses these weapons offensively. Well, it's quite clear that the Israeli military has been using these weapons offensively against the Palestinians. They're bombing regularly Syria. They just bombed Damascus again. They're using these weapons against Iran. And it continues year after year, yet somehow, people who want to invoke this restriction properly against the Saudis don't want to apply it to Israelis, including Senator Murphy. What's the situation there?

**William Hartung:** Well, it's a political situation. There's the Israel lobby, there's the levels of support for Israel within the United States. Very few congressional members will step up and criticize. Bernie Sanders in the Senate and Jamaal Bowman in the House recently spoke out and

said, "We've got to take another look at why we're supplying all this unconditional military aid to Israel," but it's tough going. Various non-governmental organizations are trying to raise the issue, but it's hard to get a foothold in Congress.

**Ralph Nader:** What would you do, Bill, about mobilizing the public here? Everything starts back home with the people. They've got to say, Look, we've got to pay attention to our domestic necessities. We have huge child poverty, crumbling infrastructure, we don't have adequate preparation for pandemics or epidemics, we've got a serious drinking water contamination problem, serious soil erosion problem, all kinds of deferred maintenance. What are we doing blowing up other parts of the world, creating more enemies and spending our taxpayer dollars this way, often illegally? So a strong case can be made and you've made it over the years, but how do you connect? Do you have any recommendations to our listeners other than contacting their members of Congress?

**William Hartung:** Yeah. I think there's some groups that are better organized than others. The Friends Committee on National Legislation builds power in key districts, and they have people who are trained on how to deal with their member of Congress, trained on the issues so they're articulate about them. They try to build coalitions that include traditional peace movement, religious groups, business groups, a broader representation of the members' district. That that approach has a lot of promise. Groups like National Priorities Project, which articulates these kinds of trade-offs, what we're giving up by spending so much on the military. The information is there; it's what's the best way to break through to the public. And because the mainstream press covers this only very episodically, we need to build the independent press, and make it stronger, and spread it organizationally through the organizations that people are a part of.

I see three pillars. One is, what are the costs of this, the opportunity costs, which is what Eisenhower spoke about in his Cross of Iron speech in 1953. What do we need to defend ourselves? Because some people will say, "Oh yes, I would love this money for clean water and these other priorities," but if China's going to wipe us off the face of the Earth, that has to come first. So we need public education to lower the temperature and the kind of demonization of other countries that allows the Pentagon to ride that climate of fear to higher and higher budgets. And people need to feel like they can influence the government. A lot of people have given up. They forget that citizen movements have had tremendous victories in the past and can do so again and they just kind of say/think, "Oh, yeah, I know. They're wasting our money. Maybe we shouldn't be fighting these wars but what can I really do about it?" So, I think it takes empowerment through public education, and better organization.

There is quite a bit of activism in the younger generation, which isn't concentrated in the traditional peace movement. Rather, it's about climate and racial justice, but those issues can be married up with peace issues because of the issue of where the resources are going. And there are groups trying to do that and we need a renovated peace movement. We need some younger leadership to show us the way. And that is possible to bring about. There was a period of time when I would give a talk to a peace group and I'd be the youngest person in the room. Starting in my 40s this would happen; sometimes it still happens, which is crazy because I'm 67 now. But there are pockets of resistance in organizing and creativity in younger generations, and although it's been focused on other urgent issues, but I think we can bring people together. If you look at the Poor People's Campaign, they're building on issues of racial justice, stopping the war machine, and environmental restoration. They're building chapters all over the country and it's a



focal point for uniting some of these issues. One thing people can do if they're feeling disenfranchised is join up with some of these existing groups. Some of the chapters of Peace Action, which came out of the Nuclear Freeze Campaign and the Ban the Bomb movement of the '50s, are quite effective in public education and pushing their members. Attaching oneself to a group that's already fighting the good fight sometimes is a shortcut to trying to be effective as an individual.

**Ralph Nader:** Good point. And let's not forget about the year after year work of the Quakers and the Unitarians and the national Friends Committee on Legislation based in Philadelphia. We have been speaking with William Hartung, a senior research fellow at the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft in Washington, D.C. Thank you very much, Bill, and to be continued.

**William Hartung:** Yes. Thanks for having me.

**Steve Skrovan:** We've been speaking with William Hartung. We will link to his work at the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft at [ralphnaderradiohour.com](http://ralphnaderradiohour.com). Up next, we speak to the most prominent anti-war activist of the Iraq War, Cindy Sheehan. 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 April 7, 2023. I'm Russell Mokhiber.

A woman pulled alive from the rubble of a Pennsylvania chocolate factory, after an explosion that killed seven co-workers, says flames had engulfed the building and her arm when the floor gave way beneath her. That might have been the end if she hadn't fallen into a vat of liquid chocolate. The dark liquid extinguished the flame on her blazing arm but Patricia Borges wound up breaking her collar bone and both of her heels. She would spend the next nine hours screaming for help and waiting for rescue as firefighters battled the inferno and choppers thumped overhead at the R.M. Palmer Company factory. "When I began to burn, I thought it was the end for me," she told the Associated Press. The March 24 blast at the Palmer factory killed seven of Borges' co-workers and injured 10.

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

**Steve Skrovan:** Thank you, Russell. Welcome back to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*. I'm Steve Skrovan along with David Feldman and Ralph and Hannah and the rest of the gang. Our next guest rose to prominence when she camped out in Crawford, Texas to bring the Iraq war home to George W. Bush. David?

**David Feldman:** Cindy Sheehan is the mother of Casey A. Sheehan, who was killed in action in Iraq on April 4, 2004. She's an anti-war activist, the founder of Gold Star Families, and an organizer of the 2018 Women's March on the Pentagon. She is the author of "Cindy Sheehan's Soapbox Newsletter" on Substack. Welcome to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*, Cindy Sheehan.

**Cindy Sheehan:** It's so good to be here.

**Ralph Nader:** Welcome indeed, Cindy. I learned about what you did down in Texas from Amy Goodman who had you on the show when nobody was covering your encampment on the side of the road leading to the ranch of George W. Bush after he and Dick Cheney initiated their criminal war of aggression against Iraq, violating international law, federal statutes and the US

Constitution. You lost your beloved son, Casey, and you decided to do something direct. You weren't waiting for other people to get on board. Explain how this came about and once you encamped, how people began rallying until you became a national phenomenon.

**Cindy Sheehan:** Thank you, Ralph. I was in my home in Vacaville, California on August 4, 2005, a little over a year since Casey was killed. And I was watching the news and George Bush was already on vacation in Crawford, Texas, but he was doing a press conference. Twelve Marines had been killed in Anbar province in Iraq on that day and he said to the Press Corps, "The families of the loved ones can rest assured that their loved ones died for a noble cause." So I was waiting for the corporate press, any member of the White House Press Corps to ask him what was the noble cause and not one of them did. And I was going to Texas the next day for the Veterans for Peace convention in Dallas and I just thought, "You know what, I have a voice. If nobody else is going to ask him after I speak at the convention on Friday, the next day Saturday on August 6th, I'm going to just rent a car and drive to Crawford, Texas, wherever that is, and demand a meeting with him to ask him what noble cause my son was killed for." And not just my son but thousands of Iraqis at that time and hundreds of the US troops— what's the noble cause that's killing so many innocent people. Even our troops were victims of US imperialism at that time.

And so Amy did cover Camp Casey for sure, but soon after I got there, I think the same day that I was there, overnight, it became this like international phenomenon. I put my phone number on their press release, saying I was going, and I was up all-night answering calls from people all over the world. And I think that we know on February 15, 2003, millions of people around the entire world went out in protest of the Iraq war, but it started anyway. And after it started, the anti-war movement against the Iraq war kind of was in a stasis. And when people saw me literally camping on the side of Prairie Chapel Road very near to George Bush's ranch, I think it just sparked a renewal of interest and a renewal of anti-war sentiment. We had thousands of people, probably over 20,000 — we tried to keep track, but it was impossible — came out to Crawford for about the three weeks we were there that summer and we had thousands of solidarity encampments, protests, and marches all over the world. It was a focal point for people to re-spark their anti-war feeling or to possibly give voice because we got so many veterans, active-duty military and people who have family members in Iraq or Afghanistan turn up to Camp Casey that summer. So, they had a voice against the war machine. But you're right. I thought if nobody else is going to ask, then what's wrong with me? I have a voice. I'm going to go ask him.

**Ralph Nader:** Well, the way the press framed it was that you wanted a meeting, as the mother of a fallen soldier, you wanted a meeting directly with George W. Bush and he was a coward. Even though they had to drive by on their way to the airport, he didn't want to meet with you. How was it finally resolved? Did you ever get a meeting with him with all the people down there with you and with the press reporting from around the country and the world?

**Cindy Sheehan:** No. George Bush never met with me that summer. And a lot of the press though were very hostile towards our encampment, and they were saying that I was just

capitalizing on my son's death to make a political point. And after all these years, 18 years since Camp Casey, I'm still demanding accountability; I'm still demanding an anti-US imperialism. Those demands have never stopped. But, no, George Bush never met with me. He actually would say things like, "Well, I respect her right to protest but I'm a busy president of the United States." And it's so weird. It ended because we said we would stay there till he left. And then if you remember Katrina, the Hurricane Katrina happened towards the end of August, so George Bush left and so we left and we took several tons of water, toilet paper, paper towels and things that we had, that people had generously donated to Camp Casey, loaded up a bus and went to Louisiana to deliver those goods to the people who were suffering from Katrina. But then we went back several times and had Camp Caseys for probably almost the rest of George Bush's presidency, whenever he was on vacation (In Crawford) there.

**Ralph Nader:** And then of course, you took a lot of verbal abuse from the right-wing media. It's really amazing. Here's this war criminal who put forces in motion illegally, destroyed over a million Iraqi lives, blew the country apart, and to this day it's in huge convulsions. And with Dick Cheney, they're now back living the life of Riley. There was a recent article from *The Intercept* by Jon Schwarz, J-O-N S-W-A-R-Z, that asked, "What are they doing now?" And he took some of the major culprits that were responsible for this criminal invasion of Iraq and he started with George W. Bush. He said, well, he's giving speeches for over \$100,000 a speech. He's developing his painting skills. He's enjoying life. And the same with Cheney, same with Condoleezza Rice. Don Rumsfeld passed away in 2021, but he enjoyed a post-Iraq invasion career, books written, interviews on the mainstream media, as you were increasingly marginalized. They couldn't stand your moral authority. They couldn't stand the clarification of the issues that you put forward. How did you deal with this? Give us an example or give us an idea, Cindy, about how the marginalization process starts against so many people who decide to commit truth.

**Cindy Sheehan:** Well, I think it really started when I left the Democrat Party in 2007 because — and Ralph, you know this more than probably anybody in this country — as long as you stay in the safe zone of only criticizing Republicans, if you're a Democrat, or only criticizing Democrats if you're a Republican, then they give you a platform. They let you use your voice on this national stage. But once I recognized that the Democrat Party were, at that point, enablers of the Bush-Cheney war of terror around the world, and I left the party, then I started to be even more marginalized. And I lost so much support, especially when Obama became president because Obama—I was running against Nancy Pelosi in '08, you were running for president in '08, and Obama was the savior. So, to criticize him was to be racist. His first year of presidency, he won the Nobel Peace Prize. So how can there be an anti-war movement against somebody who's a Nobel Prize winner? And so, just like you, I have to be consistent with my principles with being anti-imperialist, with being pro-humanity and to recognize that everybody on this planet has the same existential right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness as Americans do. But as we can see, that American dream has become a nightmare. And I've never really had a problem with the marginalization or the attacks because I always felt I had a righteous protest, I had a righteous question that has never been answered—what noble cause? What is the noble cause for this mass murder around the world? There is nothing noble about it.

**Ralph Nader:** Well, the Conservative former judge who was on Fox News for over 20 years, Andrew Napolitano, who we had him on the show, stated that the Justice Department should

criminally prosecute Bush and Cheney for war crimes, that it's not too late; they're out of office and they're vulnerable like any other individual citizen. And of course, you know about Vincent Bugliosi's book where he recommended charging Bush and Cheney with murder relating to the soldiers whose lives were taken in the criminal action and invasion in Iraq, which of course would have included your son Casey. So are you pursuing justice for Bush and Cheney in any way or do you know if anybody else is in an organized fashion? How many parents of fallen soldiers joined you in this effort?

**Cindy Sheehan:** Well, we had several dozens of parents join us in the effort. And I know when Vincent's book came out, he got it into the hands of all of the people he felt had jurisdiction over this murder, which would have been state and county prosecutors. What gave me a little bit of hope was the DA of New York County indicting and arresting Donald Trump for things I think were far less damaging and far less criminal than what the other living presidents—George Bush, Bill Clinton, Barack Obama perpetrated. If a DA can prosecute Donald Trump for something less than mass murder or genocide, maybe my DA in my county can prosecute George Bush for murdering my son. There is no statute of limitations on murder. So I got a defeatist attitude that George Bush and Dick Cheney were never going to be prosecuted for war crimes and crimes against humanity, international crimes, but this prosecution of a former president gave me some hope that maybe the other presidents can be prosecuted for their crimes that were far more damaging than what Donald Trump is being indicted for.

**Ralph Nader:** As you know, when President Obama came into office, he was asked, was he going to prosecute Bush and Cheney for crimes, including the war in Iraq, and he said, "We're not looking backward." Well, of course, you can't prosecute anybody for crimes if you don't look backward. So he basically let them off the hook and proceeded to engage in his own forms of war crimes and decision to kill anybody he suspects anywhere in the world as prosecutor, judge, jury, and executioner, all in secret. So there goes another eight years of lost opportunity to really put some muscle behind the myth in the United States that no one is above the law when we know that presidents are above the law constantly year after year in what they often do in the White House. So do you see any groups that are still working on trying to bring Bush and Cheney under the rule of law?

**Cindy Sheehan:** Part of my introduction was that I was one of the organizers in 2018 of the 2019 Women's March on the Pentagon. We were really starting to get momentum and of course our mission was the anti-imperialist no matter who was in office. So, at that time, Donald Trump was in office and so the Bush–Cheney–Clinton war against the Middle East was still continuing things. Of course things are still continuing to this day. But then COVID came and we had no way to organize anything. Now people are just starting to organize things that are in-person. There were a couple of protests in Washington, D.C. this year—the first anti-war protests we've had nationally since COVID. So it's been kind of difficult. And the difficulty, Ralph, is that a lot of people who would be on our side to prosecute George Bush and Dick Cheney, are giving them passes because of their Trump derangement syndrome. They hate Trump more than they hate George Bush and Dick Cheney, or more than they love the idea of accountability, probably because one of their loved ones wasn't murdered in the Bush-Cheney wars or the Obama wars. With Obama, the destruction of Libya that happened under Obama and Hillary Clinton as his Secretary of State was appallingly egregious. Libya has become an open-air slave market. They

assassinated execution style the leader that was trying to lead Libya and to be a force for good, especially on the African continent. The war crimes and crimes against humanity of every single president... what I used to say about Obama was, he's not going to prosecute Bush because he wants the same professional courtesy when he leaves office. But these people need to be held accountable for genocide.

**Ralph Nader:** I think you put your finger on it, that lawlessness in the White House of varying degrees of magnitude, under all recent presidents especially, has become institutionalized. And you can catch that institutionalization by the comment that you often hear, "Well, they all do it. All the presidents violate the law. So what else is new?" So, no matter to what new level and diversity criminal violations reach under Donald Trump, that's often the argument that's used. "Well, look at Clinton. Look at Bush. Look at Obama." Well, there has to be some marker; there has to be some rumble from the people saying, "Stop, we've got to restore the rule of law, otherwise anarchy and fascism are on the horizon." Hannah?

**Hannah Feldman:** Thank you. The state hasn't seen fit to arrest Bush, Cheney, or any of the other architects of the Iraq war for their crimes. To put their priorities into context, how many times has the state arrested you for your protests?

**Cindy Sheehan:** That's a really good question. I lost count at 20. So, I've been arrested at least 20 times all over the country for protesting. I got arrested right in front of Bush's ranch one time, spent the night in the McLennan County Jail in Waco. Every time that I get arrested, always what I thought was: First of all, I never did anything violent, and I never encouraged anybody to do anything violent. I was just being arrested actually for exercising my First Amendment rights to freedom of assembly and speech and expression. And I would talk to the arresting officer and the booking officer and my fellow inmates, and say, "My son was killed in Iraq, supposedly spreading democracy to that country when his own mother can't even exercise democracy in the country that he supposedly was protecting." So, it was always really outrageous to me.

**Ralph Nader:** And you put this in your book, right?

**Cindy Sheehan:** Yes. Many different books about my brushes with law that I had never even — I'd gotten some traffic tickets but that was all until the first time I was arrested in 2005 and then, like I said, I lost count at 20 after that.

**Ralph Nader:** Cindy, what led Casey to join the military in the first place?

**Cindy Sheehan:** Thank you. That's a great question because even though the US opportunistically gave up the draft at the end of the Vietnam War, the US still had/has a poverty draft. And so we weren't in poverty, but we're a working-class family holding down more than two jobs per the breadwinners, myself and my husband. And Casey joined because he was the oldest and he felt like he could take a burden off the family by joining the military to complete his university. He had already gotten a two-year degree from the local community college, and he was ready to transfer. And his recruiter told him that he would get all this college money, he would get this huge signing bonus, he would get a laptop computer so he could take classes anywhere, anytime, anyplace in the world. All of those promises were broken. The recruiter even promised Casey that since he scored so high on the military entrance exam he already had a 2-year degree, and he was an Eagle Scout. There were so many things in his favor that he would

join the military at a higher rank than just private, and that if there were a war, his recruiter told him he would never see combat because he was too valuable of a soldier.

Well, Casey was killed in combat just probably a week after he got to Iraq. So one of the things that I've been doing since Casey was killed was to highlight the lies of military recruiters and to say even if Casey wasn't able to go and finish his university degree, I'd rather have him on my couch playing Xbox all day than murdered in a faraway country for lies of his government and the profits of a few. So it's a very important point to not allow yourself to be sucked up into this fake patriotism or to take a young person from the working class or from the inner city and promise them all of these things that seem incredible to them at the time; it's just really not worth it.

**Ralph Nader:** We're out of time. We've been speaking with Cindy Sheehan who epitomizes the principle "one person can make a difference". She wasn't waiting for other people. Her grief over her son's loss directly linked to the criminal invasion of Iraq by the war criminals Bush and Cheney led to forces being put in motion, more people getting involved, more people standing up. And if we had more people like Cindy Sheehan, they'd reach critical mass, and we would be advocating peace. We'd have a Department of Peace. And we need more Cindy Sheehans. I know many of our listeners, Cindy, want to get their reactions to you to what you've said in the program here. Can you give them a website or contact information that would let them communicate their thoughts to you?

**Cindy Sheehan:** Right. Yeah. I think the best way right now is to go to *Cindy Sheehan's Soapbox newsletter* and that's at Substack.

**Ralph Nader:** And is there anything else that you'd like to say to our listeners that we didn't cover before we conclude?

**Cindy Sheehan:** So I have an eight-year-old granddaughter who is having a hard time putting on her seatbelt all the time. And the other day I turned around and I said, "My friend Ralph Nader went to the authorities and he made driving in cars safer for you and you will wear a seatbelt because of my friend Ralph Nader and he's sacrificed a lot for this country."

**Ralph Nader:** Well, thank you. Did it work?

**Cindy Sheehan:** Well, it did. And I also explained to her, she becomes like a missile going 75 miles an hour through the windshield and she might hit me on the way out. She's just going through this thing, but it did work.

**Ralph Nader:** That personal point often works. True.

**Cindy Sheehan:** Yeah, it did work, and I said Ralph Nader is a hero and he fought for your right to be safe in a car, so you will be safe in a car. And I swear to God, that's exactly what I told her the other day.

**Ralph Nader:** Thank you very much, Cindy.

**Cindy Sheehan:** Well, thank you for having me on. It was a pleasure.

**Steve Skrovan:** I want to thank our guests again, William Hartung and Cindy Sheehan. 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", including Francesco DeSantis. And "In Case You Haven't Heard. a transcript of this program will appear on the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour* Substack site soon after the episode is posted. And remember to continue the conversation. After each show, go to the comments section at [ralphnaderadiohour.com](http://ralphnaderadiohour.com) and post a comment, a question on this week's episode.

**David Feldman:** A special segment of the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour* was held on Zoom April 12, 2023. Featured guest, an expert on slip, trip and fall was Russell Kendzior. And we taped that episode live on Wednesday, April 12th at 12:30 p.m. Eastern. Thank you, Ralph.-

**Ralph Nader:** Indeed, listeners, and get your friends and neighbors and co-workers to watch this program. Who hasn't experienced tripping, slipping, falling, and it's one of the most common injuries of humankind. And we have the expert in the United States participating in hundreds of trials, full of information—practical, legal and alarming—about what can be done about these often preventable injuries, Russell Kendzior.