

RALPH NADER RADIO HOUR EP 456 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: Hello. Excited to be here.

Steve Skrovan: And so am I. And you know why I'm excited, and you are too, I'm sure, is because we also have, as always, the man of the hour, Ralph Nader. Hello, Ralph.

Ralph Nader: Hi, everybody. And a little bit more on the racket called Medicare Disadvantage during the enrollment period coming up after our interview with Joan Claybrook.

Steve Skrovan: Very good, because we get a lot of feedback on that and a lot of questions people have. But for this show in the beginning, we want to point out that we lost another giant of the consumer movement recently. Michael Pertschuk, Chairman of the Federal Trade Commission under President Carter, passed away last month. He and Ralph were very close allies. Nader worked as the outside agitator, and Pertschuk was the inside man. Pertschuk helped draft the Natural Gas Pipeline Safety Act, the Recreational Boat Safety Act, the Federal Regulatory Road Safety Act, the Consumer Product Safety Act, the Toxic Substances Act, and the Safe Drinking Water Act. And he relished making life hard for tobacco companies like Philip Morris, and was instrumental in getting warning labels on cigarette packs and banning tobacco companies from marketing to children. We're going to devote the first half of the program to honoring Michael Pertschuk's body of work. And to help us do that, we've invited former President of Public Citizen and friend of the show, Joan Claybrook, with whom Mr. Pertschuk worked very closely on auto safety issues. Joan was the Head of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration at the same time Mr. Pertschuk headed the FTC. And that's just the first half of the show.

Our second guest will be Claire Nader, whose recent book, *You Are Your Own Best Teacher!*, speaks directly to tweens--Kids who are old enough to question why the world is the way it is, but not weighed down with the self-censorship and cynicism of adulthood. It encourages them to embrace their curiosity, feed their imaginations, ask questions about the world around them, and challenge the adults to give them better answers, and shares inspirational stories of young people who have kept asking why, who have empowered themselves with information, and who have empowered their friends and family with information, and who have changed their communities for the better.

As always, somewhere in the middle, we'll check in with our corporate crime reporter, Russell Mokhiber. But first we remember Michael Pertschuk, a champion for ordinary people until the end. David?

David Feldman: Joan Claybrook is president emeritus of Public Citizen. During the Carter Administration, Ms. Claybrook headed the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration of the U.S. Department of Transportation. Welcome back to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*, Joan Claybrook.

Joan Claybrook: Thank you.

Ralph Nader: Yeah, welcome, Joan. We're going to give some long overdue praise to Mike Pertschuk in the next few minutes. There isn't anybody in this country who has not benefitted from what he did as the chief of staff for Senator Warren Magnuson, who was the chairman of the powerful Senate Commerce Committee in the '60s and first half of the 1970s when Mike and his senior staff at the beginning, Jerry Grinstein, did something that's never been done since or before. They shepherded all these bills that Steve pointed out through the Senate and the House and had Lyndon Johnson and even Richard Nixon sign them with flourishing introductions praising their content in terms of health, safety and economic well-being. And the interesting thing about Mike, Joan, is it's not only that he learned because he read, it's not only he had great civic values and knew he held the public trust for tens of millions of American people, but he had the personal skills. And one way he fended off the corporate lobbyists, who used to own the Senate Commerce Committee, was he gave them full access to the staff so they could plead whatever they wanted. He was very friendly to them and had a good sense of humor. So it was hard to make him out as a demon; He had the personality, not just the knowledge.

A little story you may not know, Joan, when I first was recommended to him by Commissioner of the FTC, Phil Elman, back in the mid '60s, I went over to see him in the Senate office building and he invited me in and to sit down. And I said I think that there's enough evidence now to have a tire safety bill, because in product liability litigation against the tire companies in Akron, the depositions revealed inadequate testing of tires and other hazardous situations. And he looked at me and he said, "Are you out of your mind? You think the Congress is going to regulate the tire industry? Do you know how powerful the tire industry is?" And when they come in, they bring the auto industry in. So I made my arguments and left him with the material. And then I went to Senator Ribicoff's committee and he started having hearings, as you know. And Senator Magnuson didn't want his jurisdiction tread upon, and so he gave the okay to Mike to move. And he not only moved the auto safety bill, he moved the meat and poultry inspection bill plus all the other bills that Steve mentioned. You called him a brilliant strategist. Can you elaborate on that, Joan?

Joan Claybrook: Well, I think that his strategies were brilliant because he figured out how to get people to work with him, as opposed to against him. And I think that he learned this in part from Warren Magnuson, who was a very congenial guy, very senior in the Congress. He came in with Roosevelt in 1932 into the House, and we're now talking about the 1960s and '70s. And he had a very congenial personality and he got along with everybody. I think Mike saw the value of that, of not being the hard ass but rather trying to get people on his side. And he did that beautifully; he was a charming guy, very sweet, very smart, and he didn't act like a "tough insider." But he worked with people. I think I'm the only person he ever really yelled at because I came over from the House of Representatives where I was working at the time, and I tried to meet with him and discuss things with him and he would have none of it. He thought I was just a junior nobody. And eventually as I got to know him, we became dear friends.

Ralph Nader: Consider his relationship with Magnuson. He always gave Magnuson the credit. He never took credit in the media, and that's very important for a staffer to do. And tell us how he helped reorganize the Senate Commerce Committee for maximum productivity and impact.

Joan Claybrook: Well, the Senate Commerce Committee has very, very broad jurisdiction and they could write 30 or 40 bills a year and still not reach the maximum size of their jurisdiction.

Mike realized that Senator Magnuson was not going to carry all these bills himself. So as he got to know the subcommittee chairman on that committee, he recommended one after another to Magnuson to carry a particular bill. And Magnuson at first was a little reluctant. Then he said, okay, and then Mike came back with another one, and then another one, and then another one. And gradually it became clear that the strategy was to have enormous productivity out of that committee, but with a lot of the work done by the subcommittees, which was not common at that time. In fact, in the House Ways and Means Committee, there were no subcommittees at that time. So he invented a new way of getting legislation passed, and it attracted more bright young staffers that they hired to carry this work for the subcommittee chairman. And it was revolutionary, really; no one else did that. And Magnuson, because he had this generous personality, although it always had to be that he was in control, but he had this very generous personality; he got along with the subcommittee chairs, and they revered the opportunity to carry this legislation because it made them look great and it was incredibly productive during these years.

Ralph Nader: Well, you once called Michael Pertschuk "the finisher." And by that listeners, she meant that there are a lot of staff that put out press releases for their senators and representatives and be done with it. Then there's some staff who want to take the press release to a public hearing on a bill and be done with it. Then there are some who want to take it through to the floor in the House and Senate and be done with it. But Mike was never done with it until it reached to the White House for the signature of the president. Isn't that one of his brilliant characteristics. I found that even after he got the bills through the Senate, he kept watch on the House and nudged and urged and got the press to cover when members of the House weren't doing the right thing until he got the bills through. All these bills started actually in the Senate Commerce Committee and then went over to the White House. Tell us how he used this daily, very intimidating *Washington Post* columnist, Drew Pearson.

Joan Claybrook: Well, this was Magnuson as well as Mike. The auto safety bill was coming up for what's called a markup, which is where the committee members take pen to paper and make changes in the bill. And then they vote it out of committee and then it goes to the Senate floor. And then it goes out of the House or combined with the House to the White House. So this is a very critical stage when it's in committee. And Magnuson was worried that on this auto safety bill, which is a very tough bill, and made tougher by you, Ralph, with all the amendments that you were proposing through various senators. So he was worried about it. He and Mike had gotten to know each other pretty well. Mike had worked for him for about four or five years at that point. And Magnuson decided that he was going to call Drew Pearson, who was a columnist with his column in about 600 or 700 newspapers, and give him the inside scoop on how various senators were going to vote on the auto safety bill in this secret markup; markups were not public at that time.

So they called Drew Pearson in and they told him how each senator was going to vote yes or no or want amendments for this industry or that industry. And the next morning in the newspaper, all the senators' positions were elaborated, particularly those who are against Magnuson's position favoring the bill. They were spelled out in this column. And the senators were furious. So in this private secret markup that they had in the Commerce Committee, they were pissing and moaning and complaining about it. And I attended, because Senator Vance Hartke had worked with my member of Congress when I worked in the House and co-sponsored his bill, and

was very interested in getting this legislation passed. I was so innocent at that time. I'd been in Washington for six months and I wore a bright yellow dress. And it turned out I was the only woman in the whole meeting. And there were no chairs for me to sit down, so I stood up. And where I stupidly stood up was exactly the opposite of the end where Magnuson was. So every time he looked up, he saw me. And after about an hour of all these complaints, Magnuson turned to me and said to me, and I was writing notes for Senator Hartke, who hadn't arrived yet, and he said, "What are you writing?" And I said, I'm just making some notes for Senator Hartke. And he said, "Stop writing now," which of course I did. And I thought, "Wow, why is he so irritated at me?" Well, what he was doing was laying the groundwork that I was the leak. I was the youngest, most innocent, most unknowledgeable person in the room. And sure, I could never have given Drew Pearson all this information, but he framed it that way without accusing me, but just insinuating.

Ralph Nader: Yeah, well Maggie as they called him was a real fox. He was known to drink a pint of vodka about every day, but he never lost control of his concentration and he knew what was going on just about everywhere. One of Mike Pertschuk's biggest, if not the biggest, contribution actually started before we knew him, when he came to Washington in 1961 and became a staff assistant to Senator Maurine Neuberger from Oregon. And she was very interested in tobacco advertising and direct marketing to kids, giving them free cigarettes when they were 11 and 12, coming out of school in order to hook them for life. And he took that issue to the whole world. He was the main driver of a totally uphill fight. The tobacco industry was completely dominant in Congress. Nobody dared challenge it. And step by step he moved to have hearings and he had Senator Neuberger contact the surgeon general, which led to the famous 1964 Surgeon General report (*Smoking and Health: Report of the Advisory Committee to the Surgeon General of the United States*) connecting tobacco for the first time officially with lung cancer and other diseases. And then the report would come out with updates every year after that and get a lot of press. And he organized the civic community. He even went all over the world after he left the Federal Trade Commission making similar exhortations. He worked with the medical profession. There was nobody like him on that. And he got almost no credit for that. But that was one of his great contributions as a staffer. In 2017, Joan, you had a book reception for him because he was a great writer and he wrote books about the consumer movement and civic advocacy. But this one was a great book, listeners, and you really should try to read it because the title tells the whole thing. The book is *When the Senate Worked for Us: The Invisible Role of Staffers in Countering Corporate Lobbies* by Michael Pertschuk, Vanderbilt University Press, 2017. You had a lot of civic leaders and some legislators at this book signing. And I thought it was a sad occasion because at the present time, Senate staffers are full of former lobbying people. K Street lobbyists have this program of sending up youngish lobbyists to become staff and then they do their dirty work and then they come back to higher lucrative posts in their former lobbying firm. And since 1980 and Reagan and the Democrats raising money from corporate PACs that Congressman Coelho taught them to do from California in 1979/1980, the counterattack was immense and there is no Michael Pertschuk, not even close in the House and Senate these days. You go up there many times and you have lobbied extensions and strengthening of the auto and highway safety laws. You and Jackie Gillan, your collaborator, single handedly blocked the Congress from exempting autonomous vehicles from regulation couple years ago. What's your view of the Senate and the House now in the context of this great record by people like Michael Pertschuk?

Joan Claybrook: Well, I don't know that many people who have his skill, his determination or his insight, and I think that he is such a model and everyone should read this book. Every staffer should read this book. Not every senator or congressman is going to allow their staff to do what Magnuson allowed Mike to do. But Mike earned it; Mike and Jerry Grinstein, who was his predecessor as the staff director for the committee, because they're both brilliant. Magnuson learned to trust them and then delegated a lot of authority to them. And so it's a two-way street. It's that you have to have staffers who have the capacity and the interest in taking large responsibilities and skillfully implementing their responsibilities in terms of legislation. And you have to have members of Congress who are willing to delegate that authority to them to do it. I think that every staffer and every member of Congress ought to read this book because it shows how you can achieve a legislative goal and get things to the finish line, as opposed to just having hearings, or introducing bills, or voting on someone else's bill.

Ralph Nader: I would add, every civic leader who has to deal with Congress should read this book too, because it raises their expectation levels and makes them more impatient at not accepting low levels of assurances or indifference by Senate and House staff. At present time, a lot of them have been turned into toadies not allowed to flower, to rise to higher levels of significance as Mike Pertschuk and Jerry Grinstein reached in the 1960s and after the 1970s.

Joan Claybrook: One of the reasons that a lot of this happened, in fact, was that Warren Magnuson was getting quite old, and he was out of tune with the times of the 1960s. By the time 1968 arrived, when he was up for election. Jerry Grinstein realized several years ahead of that and said we have to redefine Magnuson as the person he really can be and wants to be--a consumer advocate. And this was the era where you had the race riots, and the civil rights laws, and the assassinations of Martin Luther King and Bobby Kennedy, and the antiwar movement, and the anti-nuclear power movement, and it was very much of an activist time, and Magnuson didn't look like an activist, and had not done a lot of things that would define him that way. And so they persuaded Magnuson that he had to change in order to win. He had just barely won reelection in 1962.

So they changed him into the consumer advocate of the United States Senate from his previous reputation as a vodka-drinking business lobbyist, poker player and a go along, get along kind of guy. He really wasn't. Magnuson loved what happened to him, and he loved working with Mike and with Jerry Grinstein because it did define him; his real concerns and love of legislation and helping people came forward through these staff people.

Ralph Nader: And Mike knew how to work with the Republicans too. He would wheedle the best out of them and get them to support some of these bills. Some of these bills passed, by the way, overwhelmingly; the auto safety, highway safety bills passed I think unanimously in the Senate and in the House. He worked very well with the media, Morton Mintz, in particular, of the *Washington Post*. And if you want to know what the ingredients are in terms of personality, character, civic values, and strategic acumen, this is the book to read (*When the Senate Worked for Us: The Invisible Role of Staffers in Countering Corporate Lobbies*). He doesn't brag, but he tells you story after story that shows you what the Congress could be now but isn't. It was not that it was ideal in those days, but by comparison with the moribund inkblot Congress now with corporate lobbyists swarming over every corridor and office and pumping money into the campaigns, it was a bright moment in American congressional history.

Joan Claybrook: I'd also say, Ralph, that Magnuson made friends with a lot of Republican senators because he gave them bits and pieces of things that they wanted enacted into law, and he was very congenial and he socialized with them and so on. So, as Mike points out in his book, he paved the way for Mike to be able to work with Republican senators and staffers in a very effective way.

Ralph Nader: Yeah, he played poker with them too. Well, listeners if you haven't heard about Michael Pertschuk, there were good obituaries in the *Washington Post*, *New York Times*, but not by PBS, public radio, the commercial media, or the commercial radio and TV stations. So if you want your expectations raised, if you want to be able to communicate to your members of Congress and hold them up to higher standards, you can't do better than read this book, *When the Senate Worked for Us*, by Michael Pertschuk, P-E-R-T-S-C-H-U-K. Thank you very much, Joan Claybrook.

Joan Claybrook: Thank you.

Steve Skrovan: We have been speaking with Joan Claybrook. We will link to her work and the legacy of Michael Pertschuk at ralphnaderradiohour.com. Up next, Ralph takes some OSHA mandated time off while David and I talked to Claire Nader about her latest book. Then he's going to come back with some more choice words for what we call Medicare Disadvantage. 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, December 2, 2022. I'm Russell Mokhiber.

Just nine days into his new job at Caterpillar's foundry in Mapleton, Illinois, Steven Dierkes, a 39-year-old father of three, fell into an 11-foot-deep pot of molten iron and was incinerated. Now workers at the plant are blaming lack of training, poor safety protections and grueling working conditions for his death and are threatening strike action at the world's largest construction equipment manufacturer. "My children are left without their father, I am left without my fiancée, my partner, my best friend, all because they didn't want to take better safety precautions for that type of work," said Jessica Sutter, who had two daughters with Dierkes. Sutter claimed Caterpillar has not provided any assistance or support to her and her daughters. "As far as Caterpillar, I feel that they are murderers," she said.

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. Next up, we're going to talk about empowering children. Speaking of which, Ralph is leaving this interview to me and David while he takes some well-deserved family leave. David?

Claire Nader is a political scientist and author recognized for her work on the impact of science on society. She is an advocate for numerous causes at the local, national and international level. As the first social scientist working at the Oak Ridge National Laboratory, she joined pioneering initiatives in energy conservation and the multifaceted connections between science, technology and public policy. Her latest book is *You Are Your Own Best Teacher! Sparking the Curiosity, Imagination and Intellect of Tweens*.

Welcome to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*, Claire Nader.

Claire Nader: Thank you very much, David.

Steve Skrovan: The first question I want to ask is what inspired you to write *You're Your Own Best Teacher*?

Claire Nader: What inspired me was watching children. Well, first of all, recognizing the asset. I stood many years shopping, waiting for the clerk to add us all up, and there would be children with their parents holding onto their hands, getting fidgety because they want to get going. They were fidgety. So I would be waiting behind them and I would catch their eye. They'd fidget a little more; they were kind of shy. And then we'd connect. And when they realized that I was looking at them, something magical happened. They let me talk to them. They wanted to talk to me because I recognized them. And we had some lovely exchanges. And what was interesting to me is I would ask the child a question and the child moves to answer. And the parents tried to answer for them. And I thought, my gosh. So I'd say let me see what they have to say. And then the parents would be surprised at the conversation. And that's what got me. I've always loved doing that. It was a wonderful thing to do while you're waiting to have your groceries added up and made me feel good. That's basically it. And then I got the idea this is a talent; they have something to say.

David Feldman: If Congress, the House and the Senate, and the media always presented and discussed the most important issues of our time so that tweens could participate, would we be better off as a nation?

Claire Nader: I think we would be. You know why? Because first of all, they'll have a different take on it. Second, they don't have any interest, except in the question, and they will tell you what's on their mind, and you can't help but notice that they have no axe to grind. And you're asking yourself, as an adult, what is my axe, and what's the difference if you don't have an axe to grind? Then you really focus on the problem, not any self-interest, as they say.

Steve Skrovan: Right. And I think it was Upton Sinclair who said it's hard to make someone understand something when their salary depends on them not understanding it. And the tween doesn't necessarily have a salary that's at stake that would color their answer or their opinion about something.

Claire Nader: Yeah, that's why you say they don't have any axe to grind. So with seatbelts, for example, that's why they have this practical idealism. You have seatbelts that help save lives, which ends the discussion for them--let's just do it.

Steve Skrovan: Right, exactly.

Claire Nader: It's refreshing.

Steve Skrovan: Now you define tweens as between the ages of 9 and 12. What's so special about those years between 9 and 12?

Claire Nader: Well, what's special is they're growing up. They're not quite tiny kids anymore, and they're reading. And you get them before the hormones start raging, which is puberty. And

they can think without being compromised by whatever is happening in their developing bodies. And they can also prepare, which I tried to do, (prepare them about) how to navigate your teenage years because it's coming, and you become more vulnerable maybe to the marketeers and the profiteers in what they want to do with you. So I wanted to get them a sense of self-confidence that they're going to drive this ship, not the marketeers and the profiteers. That's what's different. And I saw it happen actually. We were working with a wonderful young student, and she was a terrific student and terrific performer. We used to do Shakespeare plays up at the monument outdoors when we had staff member Penny Owen working with us who herself is a good story. And the student Selena, just walked into anything and did everything. But when she got to be a teenager, she went through a period when we couldn't even recognize her. She was more interested in boys than in what we wanted her to do. And so I thought, this is the time to do it. When you're coming in and you don't think you know everything, you're not a smart aleck, which teenagers sometimes are.

Steve Skrovan: Sure, you're talking to two former smart alecks. You talk about some young people in this group who've done some great things and I want you to kind of give a little profile of each of them as I name them. Talk a little bit about Greta Thunberg.

Claire Nader: Well, we know Greta; she's gotten lots of publicity. Greta at nine, was interesting for me. Now she says she has this so-called physical liability and that made her focus better. It doesn't matter. She did focus at nine years old on the climate and on what was happening. And that's when she went vegan. And then she persuaded her parents and sister to go vegan, to step lightly on the earth, in other words. And her father said something very interesting. He said, "Once you start down this journey," which they did, "there's no stopping it," he said. So there she was. And her mother was a singer, and she went and performed in Japan, outside of Sweden. And then she persuaded her mother just to sing where she didn't have to travel so much and use up all that fuel. That's pretty good, which brings me to the point of moral authority.

At this age, they do have a sense of morality. People are surprised when children do such sensible things. And I don't know why, but they seem to be, and they have this moral authority and they don't know it. But when they do these wonderful things, like Felix, Felix Finkbeiner.

Steve Skrovan: Someone we had on the show, yes, from Germany.

Claire Nader: Yes.

Steve Skrovan: Tell us about Felix Finkbeiner for those listeners who missed that program a few years ago.

Claire Nader: Well, Felix was taken with the Nobel Prize winner Maathai Wangari in Kenya, who planted many, many trees to keep the air cleaner. And he was taken by this example. So he wanted to plant not a million trees, but a billion trees. It was stunning enough for people to hear him say a million trees. I mean, to go from a million to a billion, by the time he was, what, 18?

Steve Skrovan: Yes.

Claire Nader: He beat his own schedule. I read recently--he's now about 25 or 26, and he's gotten the PhD probably in the environment, I'm not sure. I've been meaning to look him up.

Steve Skrovan: And this all started when he was in the fourth grade.

Claire Nader: Yeah.

Steve Skrovan: What about Autumn Pelletier? What is her story?

Claire Nader: She is Native American, and her story is her drinking water--was contaminated, and she wanted to do something about that. She became what's called a water warrior in her native indigenous language--meaning you want to save it, clean it, keep it. They think water is sacred. These ideas from different groups, like the indigenous people, can help us a lot now because they value the land in a very different way. They value the water, they value the soil and so on. By the way, I read Susan Linn's book

Steve Skrovan: We also had Susan Linn on the show.

Claire Nader: Yes, you had her on; I actually talked to her. And she gives this...well, you know what the book is about. It's about how our children are being, what can I say, abducted, seduced by the big tech companies. And you read that book. I told her it's just awful. And what I want to do to cleanse myself--this is the image that came to me--is to go to the garden where the soil is good and the earthworms are working, and put my hands in there and take the children with me who are before screens all these times. I often wonder, those kids that are spending five to six hours on screens every day, if we took them to nature and put their hands in the soil and they grew something, how that would change their relationship to the screen.

Steve Skrovan: Claire, you have a chapter in the book called "Fifth Grade Firebrands" about some Fifth graders who discovered something near their school. Tell us what that story is.

Claire Nader: Well, that story was told by Brian Schultz, and he wrote the book *Spectacular Things*. He wrote the book about that fifth grade because he taught it. He went in to teach and he asked them what they wanted to work on. Here's where the innovation comes in. The teacher comes and he asks the students, what do you want to work on? What was on their mind is the dump of a school building it was.

Steve Skrovan: There wasn't a dump near the school building. It was just the school--

Claire Nader: No, no. The school building itself was decrepit, was awful. No student should go -- They had to wear their coats in the wintertime. The furniture was broken. They had to move into the... they were overcrowded. So, they said "We would like to do something about this." They made a film to impress on the Chicago alderman about the need and although they didn't get a new school, they ended up being transferred to a much better school. And they were right in the horizon of these sparkling office buildings in downtown Chicago. The contrast was pretty stunning. So they got what they wanted and they're about 25 now, maybe. They'll never forget that as adults. And I bet they tell that story to their kids as an example of what they can change to make their life better. That was a genius of a question, what would you want to work on?

Steve Skrovan: Right

Claire Nader: And there are other examples, but you can't change the school systems very easily. They're very rigid. And so when they do... there was another example in this area where the teacher said, I want you to teach yourselves. I'm going to watch while in this semester, let's

say it's a semester, you handle the instruction. And they did marvelous things. What am I saying? I am saying that we have to be open to different ways of teaching and these school mandates from the state are very destructive. Community colleges are meant not to be all the same. They emphasize community; wherever they're located is a community. And they have needs and they're supposed to be looking at those needs and shaping the curriculum to meet the needs, both for the trades, but also for the liberal arts part of the instruction.

Steve Skrovan: So, Claire, take us through some of the headings that will inspire people to pick up the book and read it.

Claire Nader: Well, we start with “The Beautiful Spark.” It's the asset, the idealism, the spark that the teens of the tweens can bring to our lives and our public discussions, actually. Then there is “The Truth About Kids. And we have “The Truth About School.” And then we have a section called “Let's Talk about Screens”, “Time Out for Gratitude.” How about this—“Playing Different Roles Expands the Mind.” And then we have something on “Concentration, Imagination and Curiosity.” Then we have a section that says, “What If?” that stimulates “What if we had an energy system just on renewables; how would life be different?” Then we have “The Peer Group and Other Outside Pressures.” How about “Company Ads and Deception.” “The Dictionary: A Door to the Meaning, Understanding and Enchantment.” Most of these children have never heard of dictionaries. And then there is a bit on solitude, “Time to Reflect.” That's important for children who are besieged by the devices. Then “Addictions” and we have a line here, “Who's Raising You Anyway?” Turns out it's the video game. “Talking Back, Controlling What We, the People, Already Own” --like the commons, the public airwaves, the public lands. You say something about “The Importance of a Questioning Mind,” all intended to teach a lesson, a little lesson. Then how about “Discovering How You're Controlled by Companies?” Then we give some examples of “Good Companies.” What's a good company? Patagonia being one. Then we go back to history. This is an important part, the “Three Historic Americans Beating the Odds Through Self-Education,” and they are Ben Franklin, Frederick Douglass, and Helen Keller. Fascinating stories of their lives and how they educated themselves and then went on, all of them, to expand their interests to all kinds of social inequities, things they wanted to control. Helen Keller was one of the founders of the American Civil Liberties Union. If you say, “Helen Keller” to most people, they'd say, oh, she was blind and deaf. Yet she made a life for herself; she overcame her disability, so-called and went further than just her own problems.

And then we have what it means to “Becoming An Informed Consumer.” And then “Becoming a Good Ancestor.” This is interesting. We have a section on *Children's Express*, which ran for 20 years, I think from 1975 to 1995. On *Children's Express* were children 10 to 13 who actually ran a news service. And they went all over. They had a bureau in New York and a bureau in Japan and one in England. And they went to the White House press corps and they asked the impertinent questions. They didn't make a paragraph out of the question. It wasn't that long. It was just these smart little questions. And, for example, when Rockefeller was asked at a press conference why he's still supporting Ford “when he dumped you,” that was the language. And we found Rockefeller saying, “He didn't dump me.” That was quite a thing.

And then “The Beauty Business” – we touch on that with Anita Roddick. “Business is Unusual.” And then “The Two Great Pillars of the Civil Justice System,” which is torts and contracts, and

“Holidays: What We Celebrate” and what they say about ourselves, and then “War Is a Racket,” “Waging Peace, Not War.” And we end with “Animal Welfare and Respecting Nature.” So it's quite a stimulating number of topics, each one teaching a lesson.

Steve Skrovan: We have mostly adults listening to this program, so it's important to talk about their role in raising the inspiring tweens. And you talk about one particular teacher named Penny Owen. How did she relate to kids?

Claire Nader: Oh my gosh. We had her come and work. She has a PhD in educational anthropology and a theater background. She's short, a little bundle of energy, and I mean bundle of energy. So, we took her on staff for the Nader Trust, a small nonprofit here that we established in my brother's (Shafeek Nader's) memory, and she came for two years and stayed for nine. We took her into the schools only... I mean, I took her around before we took her on, and I said to the teachers, “Would you like help free to you, the school system?” And she would work under your eye. She had a PhD; they didn't. And so the teacher would be there, and she made that schoolroom full of energy. She'd get down on the floor with these little kids and head to head solve a problem. You know, some kid cries or they felt their feeling was hurt or something. And she would get them to where they laughed at the silliness of what they were doing.

For example, she had them do Shakespearean plays up at the monument (In Winsted CT.), kids playing Shakespearean plays with adults, but the children were involved. And that's where Selena West came in. And in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* she played Puck. What am I saying? Penny Owen, is the kind of teacher you need in the schools, but don't give her a mandate. For example, she wanted to teach the children about the curriculum when the Native Americans came, or we came, and moved them off the Cherokee Trail of Tears and all of that, and she would teach it to them but in a play form. They would take part, I mean, you would be the bad guy and somebody else would be the native and you have to solve a problem. And she had them so engaged in the solution to that problem democratically that they would go home wanting to go to Mrs. Owen's school. And the parents began to say, and the grandparents began to say, “Who is this Mrs. Owen?” It was quite a run.

Steve Skrovan: Yes. So she made it fun, got down to their level. This is especially important, I think, today when there's all this talk about critical race theory and what are we teaching our kids. And some schools, I think in Texas, banning books, and I think in Florida wanting to not teach anything that varied from the official history of...

Claire Nader: The myth.

Steve Skrovan: Yeah, the myth. And so, how do you teach young people under 12 these hard truths about our history? Can you be truthful to them? Some are afraid they're going to be alienated and feel bad about themselves if we teach them about how we move the native populations off the land.

Claire Nader: I think if you teach them the truth, they can handle it. I'll tell you a little story. In the book I have from the *New York Times*, kids love to do this, kids love to do that. Remember that?

Steve Skrovan: Yeah.

Claire Nader: And I think the last one was kids can handle the truth. So a tween was reading the book and she couldn't wait to call me up; she'd just gotten it. And she called me up and she said, "I want to tell you I can handle the truth even when it's painful, but I can handle it." That's what she wanted to tell me. I found that so interesting.

Steve Skrovan: Despite what Jack Nicholson said in *A Few Good Men*, they can handle the truth. We're talking with Claire Nader, author of *You Are Your Own Best Teacher! Sparking the Curiosity, Imagination and Intellect of Tweens*. Claire, are there any last words you want to leave with us?

Claire Nader: Yeah, I would like people to get this book and read it and use it. And I got a very nice comment from Sherry Turkle, who teaches at MIT and has worked on such issues as technology and society, and what she said is that *You Are Your Own Best Teacher!* is for a family sit-down across the generations. We must be more curious about who controls our media, climate, food and politics. What is keeping us back from confidence in our ability to act? We are at a break-the-glass moment. This is a necessary conversation, and she means across the nation because she understands the dangers of not doing that, which is taking us all down with the devices. These we have to control like we control our cars... I hope, some standards and so on... but it's important to listen to that voice. She's worked in this area for a long time and she knows the damage that can be done.

Steve Skrovan: We're talking to Claire Nader. Her book is *You Are Your Own Best Teacher! Sparking the Curiosity, Imagination and Intellect of Tweens*. And this is where you can get the book; all you need to do is go to inspiringtweens.com and there's a special holiday season offer. People who place orders for the autographed hardback edition by December 16th, 2022 of this year, will also receive a free copy of Richard Panchyk's paperback, *Power to the People! A Young People's Guide to Fighting for Our Rights as Citizens and Consumers*. Sounds like a great holiday package for the young people in your family. Thank you once again, Claire Nader.

Claire Nader: Thank you.

Steve Skrovan: We have been speaking with Claire Nader. We will link to her book, *You Are Your Own Best Teacher!* at ralphnaderradiohour.com. So Ralph, before we end, you wanted to talk a little bit more about something we've talked about a lot and people had a lot of questions for us on, and that is Medicare, what we call Medicare Disadvantage.

Ralph Nader: Yeah, the enrollment period for new enrollees in Medicare is up December 5th. So between late October and December 5th, the insurance giants have been flooding, literally flooding the radio, TV, print media, trying to seduce elderly people with very deceptive advertisements into joining this so-called Medicare Advantage, which we call Medicare Disadvantage. And I just got a brochure in the mail, because they want traditional beneficiaries of Medicare to switch over, which is a serious mistake and should be considered a criminal inducement. I just got a brochure. The return address was AARP in red, Medicare Supplement, and then UnitedHealthcare. That's the health insurance giant that works with AARP. It's really a totally corrupt promotion.

On the cover, it says in red, "Gym discounts and more." And inside they say, look, if you become an advantage enrollee, you'll have all kinds of discounts and you'll have hearing and vision care and gym privileges. Well, two points on that. Why do they emphasize gym of all

things? When you're elderly and you got health insurance, you're worried about getting sick and having your bills paid. They emphasize the gym because they're trying to attract the healthier elderly people who have fewer claims so they can make more profit. It's the same thing with their free lunches that they have around the country; it's UnitedHealthcare-AARP collusion. The only people who are going to go to these lunches are people who are mobile, and they're going to have fewer claims and they'll be signed up and UnitedHealthcare and AARP will make more money.

Now AARP comes across in its own promotion as a great consumer advocate for elderly people. But it was commercialized years ago. It's a nonprofit, and in 2021 it made over \$800 million in profits by working with the UnitedHealthcare Corporation, selling royalties off the use of its name, trademarks, et cetera. AARP, a nonprofit, pays its CEO \$1.3 million a year.

But here's the most serious part of it, listeners, and it was treated in a recent article on Lever News, L-E-V-E-R N-E-W-S .com. And it's why is AARP boosting Medicare privatization? Well, one, because they're making huge money off it. But second, and this is the serious part, they, AARP or UnitedHealthcare, is not telling you the downsides of Medicare Advantage. Number one, they don't tell you that you'll lose your free choice of doctor and hospital. That's pretty important to people. They put you in narrow networks where you live and it could be not a very good hospital. It could be not a very good physician; too bad because you've given it up in the fine-print contract. The second is, if you have a serious ailment and your doctor wants to recommend a treatment that isn't 100 years old, the doctor has to ask for prior authorization by the insurance company, which under Medicare Advantage has a much higher denial of claims than traditional Medicare. They almost never mention the words traditional Medicare in their deceptive advertising. And the third, the US Justice Department is nailing UnitedHealthcare and other companies for inflating the reimbursements under Medicare Advantage from the federal government. As we speak, they're after them. Big *New York Times* article on that about six weeks ago. And then people don't know that the Medicare Disadvantage corporate alliance with AARP gets \$7 billion a year in taxpayer subsidies and that the traditional Medicare beneficiaries are forced to subsidize the corporate Medicare Advantage version. So it's pretty bad and there's more to it. And I think there's going to be more exposes. But all this is to warn listeners, and if you know elderly people who are being swarmed over with these deceptive brochures – tens of millions of people are receiving them, have been receiving them for several weeks – tell them not to go into Medicare Advantage. It's a snare and a delusion. And it's a cruel surprise when you're really sick, and you need those bills paid. You want to be in traditional Medicare and advocate for single payer for everybody. Everybody in, nobody out, free choice of doctor and hospital, no inscrutable bills, far less billing fraud like Canada, less anxiety and a much higher quality of life than the present corrupt, rotten system that we've allowed to our disgrace as a society to fester and to even have most of Congress on the side of the insurance giants, as well as both administrations, Obama, Trump, and now Biden. They're not doing anything about it and they're serving up millions of elderly people to these deceptive promotions.

Steve Skrovan: Well, Ralph, if you don't mind, I want to run some listener feedback by you that we've gotten on this topic and have you respond. One listener says, "I don't have a problem with Medicare Advantage. They give \$30 back to me every month, \$150 for drugstore items, 1,000 for dental, eyeglasses, \$200 per year. The hospitals all take it in emergency. The only thing is narrow networks. Some docs don't take Medicare or any insurance at all." And this listener says,

"The solution is we need to force docs to take all insurance and abolish networks." What's your response to that?

Ralph Nader: We need single payer. That's a better answer to that question. Well, what the person listed was not the serious illness problem. When you have serious illness and big bills, that's when you need traditional Medicare. What these Medicare Advantage people doing are giving you frills. But when the crunch comes, it comes down on you, not on the insurance companies. The data are quite clear, a much higher rate of denial of claims under Medicare Advantage, and you're trapped in a network, as the questioner pointed out, that's not a small matter, especially in rural areas. And to make matters worse, you are being subsidized unfairly by traditional Medicare beneficiaries against their will. So it's how Dr. Fred Hyde, who knows more about hospitals and health insurers than anybody I've ever met, summed it up on Medicare Disadvantage. He said, "it's not what you pay, it's what you get" when you really need insurance reimbursement.

Steve Skrovan: So Ralph, what do you tell the people about this feedback we've gotten from listeners, who say, "Hey, I can't afford to pay the 20% for the Medicare supplemental."

Ralph Nader: Well, it depends what you want in terms of coverage when you're sick. Can you afford to have your claims denied? How about that for not being able to afford it? So that's what he means by "it's not what you pay, it's what you get." And when you owe thousands and thousands of dollars when you get sick and they deny it, that's a lot more than what you're supposed to be paying for the supplemental. But more seriously is that the inducement to go into Medicare Disadvantage is, "Oh, if you don't like it, you can always go back to traditional Medicare." Well, now the health insurance companies with the collusion of government and the Congress have made it very, very hard to go back to traditional Medicare and get pre-existing conditions covered. Very hard. And so you're trapped. You're trapped in the Medicare Advantage cul-de-sac and you're trapped in the narrow network that they force you to deal with when you get sick – narrow network of hospitals and doctors.

So I just will urge the questioner and others to read this article in levernews.com, and there will to be more coming out and you'll understand why it's a bad deal to go into Medicare Advantage. I've never seen more deceptive ads for any consumer service ever than Medicare Disadvantage. Why is Joe Namath paid a huge amount of money to push Medicare Advantage on TV? What is his record other than passing a football? When you see high celebrities like that who have no knowledge at all and are being paid heavily to promote something that they don't even read about in terms of the fine print, you automatically say no sale. Period. No sale.

Steve Skrovan: Well, that's something for you to say that this is the most deceptive piece of advertising you've encountered in your long career and history. So thank you for that, Ralph.

Ralph Nader: You're welcome.

Steve Skrovan: I want to thank our guests again, Joan Claybrook and Claire Nader. For those of you listening on the radio, that's our show. For you podcast listeners, stay tuned for some bonus material we call "The Wrap Up." A transcript of this program will appear on the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour* website soon after the episode is posted.

David Feldman: Subscribe to us on our *Ralph Nader Radio Hour* YouTube channel. And for Ralph's weekly column, it's free, go to nader.org. For more from Russell Mokhiber, go to corporatecrimereporter.com.

Steve Skrovan: The American Museum of Tort Law has gone virtual. Go to tortmuseum.org to explore the exhibits, take a virtual tour, and learn about iconic tort cases from history.

David Feldman: To order your copy of the *Capitol Hill Citizen*, "Democracy Dies in Broad Daylight," go to capitolhillcitizen.com.

Steve Skrovan: And remember to continue the conversation after each show. Go to the comments section at ralphnaderradiohour.com and post a comment or question on this week's episode. We'll pick some standout comments, ask Ralph for his response, and post his reply.

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*. Thank you, Ralph.

Ralph Nader: Thank you, everybody.