

## RALPH NADER RADIO HOUR EPISOSDE 468 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:** Good morning.

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

**Ralph Nader:** Hello, everybody.

**Steve Skrovan:** We got an exciting show today. Last September, the Nord Stream pipelines, which were built to carry natural gas from Russia to Europe, were damaged by underwater explosions in the Baltic Sea. It was obvious that someone had sabotaged the pipelines. But the identity of the saboteurs was a mystery. Until now. Investigative reporter Seymour Hersh has published a bombshell report, citing its source with "direct knowledge of the operational planning." Mr. Hersh reports that the US Navy planted the explosives using a June 2022 NATO training exercises cover. A Norwegian surveillance plane triggered the explosives in September and the Biden administration convened a taskforce to plan this operation in December 2021, two months before Russia invaded Ukraine. When approached for comment, the White House responded, quote, "This is false and complete fiction," unquote. And the CIA said, "This claim is completely and utterly false." But given Mr. Hersh's track record with exposing the US military's atrocities--the My Lai massacre and the Abu Ghraib prisoner abuses, to name just two, we look forward to hearing more from Seymour Hersh.

After that we'll welcome back our friend, director of Project Censored, Mickey Huff. Project Censored empowers students and the public to make informed decisions by teaching them media literacy and critical thinking skills. We'll speak to Mickey about this year's edition of Project Censored's annual volume, *State of the Free Press 2023: The News That Didn't Make the News —And Why*.

As always, in between we'll check in with our corporate crime reporter, Russell Mokhiber. But first, in his autobiography *Reporter*, Seymour Hersh writes, quote, "My initial reporting on My Lai, Watergate, Kissinger, Jack Kennedy, and the American murder of Osama Bin Laden was challenged, sometimes very bitterly. I will happily permit history to be the judge of my recent work," unquote. David?

**David Feldman:** Seymour Hersh is the pre-eminent investigative journalist of our time. He has won five George Polk Awards, two National Magazine Awards, and more than a dozen other prizes for investigative reporting. In 1970, Mr. Hersh won the Pulitzer Prize for exposing the My Lai Massacre and its cover-up during the Vietnam War. In 2004, Mr. Hersh exposed the Abu Ghraib prison scandal in a series of pieces in *The New Yorker*. You can read him now over at Substack. Welcome back to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*, Seymour Hersh.

**Seymour Hersh:** Hello.

**Ralph Nader:** Welcome indeed, Seymour. You just recently wrote a long article on your Substack called "The Nord Stream Pipeline" and you basically demonstrated that the Biden Administration was behind blowing it up. But I want to lay the predicate for our listeners, so we know the sequence and what the motivations were. What is the Nord Stream pipeline one and two, and who owns it?

**Seymour Hersh:** They are two super-sized pipelines that were built by a private enterprise. The first one was constructed in — they began doing it in the Bush-Cheney years. It went online in 2011. And for 10 years, until shut down just last year by Putin himself, or by the Russians anyway, was a major supplier of very inexpensive methane gas from the fields in Russia, with a pipeline directly from Russia into Germany. As I say, incredibly, the whole length of the Baltic Sea. And it was a major factor and it being a continuing incredible boon in industry in Germany. They have right now the largest chemical company in the world, BASF, hundred thousand employees, all the car dealers we all know about, Mercedes, et cetera. And it provided cheap gas. The pipeline was built by a consortium, 51% owned by Gazprom, which is owned by Russian oligarchs who paid - in the thrall of Putin of course. 49% were owned by four different European private companies; they're all stockholders. And the European companies, among other things, were responsible for selling a lot of the gas to downstream, down the various other small gas companies all over Europe, Western Europe and even in Germany.

So that was the big boon. And I have to say the history here, from the Kennedy administration on, the notion of Russian gas being used to power parts of West Germany and West Europe was always a problem. It was only seen by the White House as Russia weaponizing gas in order to get more credibility in the East-West conflict. At the time I'm talking about, we begin the story, both pipelines were completed, neither one was shoveling gas. One had been shut down by the Russians and one had been shut down by the Germans. And now, the event that we are talking about took place long before Russia invaded--but in the period when Russia was threatening to.

**Ralph Nader:** Let me just clarify this for our listeners, Sy. When you came out with this article, you quote in the article that you asked the White House for a comment about your conclusion based on your source that the US government, through the CIA and allies in the Nordic countries, Norway especially, worked and they blew up the three out of four of the pipelines. They blew up Nord Stream 2, the two pipelines, and one of the Nord Stream 1. When you asked the White House for a comment, a spokesperson said, quote, in an email, "This is false and complete fiction," end quote. You asked the CIA for a comment. They said, quote, "This claim is completely and utterly false." But in your article, I think you have the absolute evidence of the motivation, which is not to give Putin leverage with Germany and other countries during the precursor to the Ukraine invasion and during the Ukraine war. You write that Joe Biden himself, at a briefing, defiantly said, quote, "If Russia invades, there'll be no longer a Nord Stream 2. We will bring an end to it," end quote. This was repeated by Undersecretary of State Victoria Nuland in a state department briefing with little press coverage. She said, quote, "I want to be very clear to you today," she said in response to a question. Quote, "If Russia invades Ukraine, one way or another, Nord Stream 2 will not move forward," end quote. The motivation was clear and blowing up the pipelines created more markets for US natural gas, liquefied natural gas streaming to Europe for lucrative profits. Why do you think so much of the reaction to your article was disbelieving? How could they disbelieve it?

**Seymour Hersh:** Well, because I said I learned that information from a source who had access to the various internal debates and what happened in Norway. What happened, Ralph, is that this group was organized long before. Biden made a speech — made that comment which no longer seems to be in the argot of the Western press. It seems to have disappeared. We've forgotten about it all in newspapers like the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times*. But Biden made this comment in February, a couple of weeks before Russia invaded. And as you remember, there was a long build-up to the war and Russia began to move forces there clearly and then they were moving into Belarus, and it was clear that something was coming when this idea wasn't even an idea. Before Christmas of 2021 when Russia began to go and the tension was building, the National Security Advisor of the Biden Administration, Jake Sullivan convened a meeting, a very secret meeting in a very special room in an executive office building across the street from the White House in the same compound, a meeting of people from the agencies – CIA, NSA, the Joint Chief of Staff, et cetera, State Department, even maybe justice.

It was a high-level meeting, and the discussion was, and I described in some detail the specific issue. In the first debate, the question was, and I used this language very pointedly, because it wasn't the language used. The group was asking do we want to do something to stop this; do we want to do something that's reversible or irreversible. And the reversible choices would be more sanctions, which weren't working. And the nonreversible option, that everybody understood, was maybe attack the pipelines because we always saw the Russian's great abundance of gas and the Russian delivery of gas to Europe - from the 1962 Jack Kennedy days on - as weaponizing gas and to convince NATO and Western Europe to take us off the position on our longstanding hardline attitude toward all things Russian.

So, you have that background. And what happens is the people doing the initial mission, doing the discussions, the people that were organizing, included a lot of people with a lot of knowledge about the world and events. And as far as they were concerned, getting a plan to take out the pipeline as an option could be used to convince Putin to stop his offensive. And that's why Biden spoke out, I guess. Maybe it was just because he sometimes blurts out things. So, it's quite a secret. When he said what he said, he was very obsessed (with the potential of a Russian invasion). And it was two weeks before Russia invaded. Meanwhile this team assembled that did the job. It's a famous notion that the CIA and all the secret groups, they don't work for the Constitution, they work for the crown; they work for the president.

So, they went ahead, and they planned it. They moved to Norway. Norway has a longstanding hatred of Russia too, and also has a 1400-mile border along the Atlantic coast from Oslo - basically in Europe - all the way up to the Arctic Circle where they meet Russia. And so, we had been putting in incredible new radars, new air bases and submarine bases there-- hundreds of millions (of dollars), probably much more than that and building up our assets there and building up the Norwegian military. And we've had a longstanding tie. I published a piece today about how the Norwegians were behind an event that led to the Gulf of Tonkin, the famous time that the President (Lyndon Johnson) and (Secretary of Defense Robert) McNamara lied about what happened and accused the North Vietnamese (of attacking U.S ships in the region) and got the Congress to vote to give him (President Johnson) the power to do anything he wanted to. So, the Norwegians helped set up the Vietnam War. That's the connection I was making today in a piece I did, because I think this is very serious stuff. And of course, it is.

**Ralph Nader:** Your source called the attack on the Nord Stream 2 and Nord Stream 1 "an act of war," and of course it was. It was basically owned 51% by a Russian corporation that's almost a state corporation tied to the Kremlin. Why didn't Putin make a bigger deal out of this? Why didn't he say if only for propaganda and political purposes what you have discovered? They patrol the Baltic, as you put out, very, very closely. They know what's going on. Only the US had the intricate technology and skill to pull something like this off in a covert way. It was a very daring thing but why didn't Putin make a bigger deal out of this? He lost a lot of hard currency as a result.

**Seymour Hersh:** In one year they made \$45 billion that was detoured by the oligarchs and passed back to him (Putin). And you can imagine how much money that was. If they can make that much money (which went into the Russian treasury) in one year from the Gazprom 1, imagine with two pipelines. Of course, Ralph, I have no idea why he didn't. I will say this – there was maybe a slight thought he had that maybe NATO was involved, because Norway was one of the first signers of the NATO treaty in 1949. They've always been hardliners. But I have no idea. They're certainly making noise now. I will tell you, above and beyond the person I was quoting. I have made contact with significant people that were involved in financing the pipelines initially way back when and also in making sure that everything was appropriately done in terms of legal issues, et cetera. And also people that — the only thing I could tell you is that among people in the pipeline business it's very well-known (that Russia didn't do it). I said this publicly in some interviews that I've done. The first story I wrote was two, three weeks ago about the pipeline industry. We all know that Russia didn't do it; everybody knows they did not do it. There might have been some vagueness about who, but they were pretty sure all along who, because who else threatened to do it but the president and his undersecretary, Victoria Nuland? They're the two that went public with it, much to the dismay of the people actually doing the covert operation. The problem is the Baltic Sea has no oil in it. There are no divers running around. How do you suddenly produce a couple of divers going down? In order to bomb these pipelines, you have to find the right place – the Norwegians helped a lot with that – not only to identify depth but you also have to make sure the pipelines were both... — one was in Swedish territorial water and the other one was in Denmark. And there's something else called, and I'm sure you know about, territorial rights, in which these countries have rights to their goods under the sea, the fishing crops, et cetera; they have some economic rights to those too.

I'll leave it to Norway and Sweden to talk about how much they knew, but these guys exercised a lot and they practiced. Divers are going to go down with that kind of explosive, they want to know what they're doing. And so, at the time to do it, that was in late May or June, there was a major NATO exercise; every year there's been one — they just had the 22nd year exercise in Italy where the headquarters always had an exercise in the Baltic Sea, because it's a competitive area. We wanted to show we could sail around — NATO could sail the ships. And this year they added in a clever idea – a mining exercise. And I have to tell you that in the Navy category of wonderful things to do, being a mining officer that high, you've got to be a SEAL or a pilot or a submariner. -And that was all just a cover and there were a dozen ships running around, dropping mines and blowing them up. In that time span they did the job, they put the weapons, they mined the floor for the pipelines, and they set a timer for two days, 48 hours, to go off.

But the President changed his mind and what drove everybody very crazy was that in late September, he said, "No, I'll wait for a better time." In late September, and I'm not quite sure

what was going on except by then the intelligence was changing quite a bit, that at best they would get a stalemate, and that Ukraine was going to be a long, drawn-out war. And as explained to me the thinking of those involved was, that as long as Germany controlled the pipeline, the German government could release the sanctions at any time. And Germany was getting very edgy. They didn't want to put as much money and weapons as Biden wanted - given their issue in World War II - into that war. And there was a lot of concern that Western Europe and Germany wouldn't support the war as much as Biden wanted. Biden is in on this war (even now he's visiting Zelensky, the head of Ukraine) even though it's not going anywhere. I don't know whether he's doing it for reelection because being tough to Russia may be a good thing politically for him. I have no idea what the reason was. But what he did by blowing up the pipelines, he made it impossible for Ukraine to make a decision later that they weren't going to support him and open up the pipeline so they can have heat because winter was coming. And enough heat and enough energy was needed to drive this great industrial phase they had. So, Biden denied them that pay. And I have to tell you, that story I did was I think the 8th of this month (February). But each day it gets much more momentum in Europe.

**Ralph Nader:** How extensive was the damage? Is it repairable in a few months or is it much more extensive?

**Seymour Hersh:** The pipelines are 750 miles of steel covered by concrete. Concrete is to protect it from the salinity. Even though the Baltic really isn't as salty as the Atlantic, salinity over time will corrode things. And so, to blow up the pipeline, it took an enormous charge of C-4, enough to take down a major corporate headquarters in New York. It could just really blow the hell out of things. And they were planted on all four. But the delay caused enormous problems for that because they had put the mines down with a 48-hour delay and there was no question that everything would be okay. The way you trigger a mine remotely is through a low-frequency sonar system, a very low beep. And it's like, Ralph, as kids you played a game where somebody would want to get into the room you were playing in and you went "knock-knock-knock, knock-knock-knock-knock, knock" and don't let them in. That's exactly what it's like. It's a very primitive signal. It's like playing a flute and changing the octave. So, as I said, there were a couple of fears. One is that the salinity would make things impossible. They stayed out too long, and it was close to four months later that he blew it up. The other problem was that because there's a tremendous amount of shipping in the Baltic Sea. There's a lot of cod; it's a very busy place. It has a lot of pollution too, naturally. And everybody communicates in low frequency and the random chance that some low frequency going off in two or three or four months of blowing it up was high. It was a big issue for these people. And when the president decided to do it, the only thing that happened is one of the four bombs that were supposed to blow the second pipeline of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline failed.

**Ralph Nader:** Is the gas still flowing in one of the pipelines?

**Seymour Hersh:** No, no. What happened is Nord Stream 1 was stopped the summer before because of the very bad blood between Putin and the Biden administration and the fact that Germany was supporting the Biden administration. Gazprom basically does what Putin wants. There's no direct evidence but clearly, they closed it off. They shut it down. So that left Germany with no gas. Pipe stream 2 had been filled with gas and was shut down by a sanction, the German sanction under pressure in September. It was ready to go. So, in both pipelines you had 750 miles of methane gas. That's a tremendous amount. So, that's what poured out. And as you know, it's

an environmental disaster too, in terms of all that gas bubbling to the surface. But it would sit there in storage where they couldn't do anything with it. They couldn't pump it back. The only thing to do would be to open it up, but they kept it sealed. So, the situation you have is the Biden administration cannot acknowledge it, even though I had such specific detail. And I left certain phrases in there that were works of art - being subtle with this White House might be useless - but I left clues that I really did know a lot more than I was writing, because I didn't want it to lead back to the people who were helping me. And I was very opaque. It was always "somebody who knew something about it."

**Ralph Nader:** Why did the mainstream press demonstrate such skepticism? They didn't pick it up, they didn't really report it as they have on some of your past exposés? The *New York Times* seemed to even ignore it. They reported the denials by the White House. I don't understand; they can't keep this secret. There are too many hundreds of people who were involved in this operation, from the US Navy to Norway, and yet they're saying what you concluded is false, ridiculous, et cetera. Why is the press behaving this way and why is the Congress, right down to the last person, not raising this and demanding a congressional hearing?

**Seymour Hersh:** Ralph, do you think that Chuck Schumer, the Democratic head of the Senate, is going to ask for an investigation into the Biden White House? Ha-ha-ha! Not a chance. The *New York Times* is full of good reporters — Ralph, I'm sure I said the same thing to you in our 800 years of friendship, which is that if 90% of the editors right now were cut off and just let go, the papers would be much better; I worked there for seven years and I came to understand that. But there's still so much in process such that if you have a guy that's hard-charging and not afraid to tell you what they think and you've got a guy that's more complacent, he gets the job. I've seen it happen at the *New York Times*.

**Ralph Nader:** It's obviously going to come out. It's going to spill out in all kinds of ways. You can't cover up something like this. And it's going to show that the Biden White House lied through its teeth.

**Seymour Hersh:** Well, what scares me about that is, first of all, the Biden White House will never admit it. It was an act of war. I've done a lot of work obviously reading a lot of review articles on the law of the sea, and there's a lot of laws dating back to 1884 about telegraph lines underwater when we first expanded the telegraph. And if you cut into that inadvertently or deliberately, there was a price to be paid. So, there's no question if he admits that he's done incredible damage claims, not to Russia, not to Putin, but to the stockholders of Gazprom and the stockholders of the other four companies involved. They can file lawsuits. And also, it'll show that when push comes to shove, Europe no longer can depend on America. We don't have their back anymore. If we don't support him in that stupid, dumb war in the Ukraine, and nobody has the inclination to do so, I assure you, that he's going to cut off your gas line? And you're going to be cold and cost more? Right now, in Italy, the price of gas is three to four times higher. In France, electricity, which is powered by gas furnaces is five times higher. The price in London and Germany has gone up, although Germany - because don't forget, this started in September and then right away the Germans - I don't know whether they anticipated what happened or not - began to build up their stockpiles. So, they got through this winter with a mild winter. But next year, they are all looking at disaster. It'll be cold and they won't have nearly enough gas, and it will cost three, four, five times more. And we, of course, are willing to sell them liquefied natural gas that's three to four times what they charge here over there. So, that isn't going to work. The

Chinese may have some gas to give them, but they had a downtime financially in construction in their industrial base because of COVID. So, they have some gas to sell, to share with the Germans. So, they could struggle through this year, but next year there's no reserves; everybody's going to be back to business.

**Ralph Nader:** We're talking with Sy Hersh, who's written an article called "The Nord Stream Pipeline". The *New York Times* called it a mystery, but the United States executed a covert sea operation that was kept secret until now. And until now meant until Seymour Hersh exposed it. Is it fair to say that Putin didn't make a big deal out of this? Because if he did, he would have revealed what he feared the most, which is a direct act of war by NATO forces led by the US, and he didn't want to escalate what he started in the Ukraine. Is that a fair interpretation?

**Seymour Hersh:** Well, I mean, I've seen it written, but of course that's a fair interpretation. I've learned in the last couple of weeks that I have to be very careful to show no significant signs that I understand there are two sides in every question because the irrational dislike of Putin in this country is very strong. Actually, Ralph, one very smart man that I know inside, not in public but in the government, who sees everything actually said that Biden's invective towards Putin began very early once he got to the presidency because he was suffering domestically, and his ratings were way down. It's a terrible thing but presidents always do well in wars. It's amazing how they always get more popular. Bush got the 80% in the insane Iraq war, the stupid Iraq war.

So, the problem is, two years ago, the Russian people would have said, go to war over crazy, third-level human beings, the subhuman Ukrainians? That's how Ukrainians were viewed, with such contempt. And he had no support for it. He couldn't have gone to war even if he wanted to. But over the next year, Biden's invective actually played a role in making Putin more popular to the point that by the time he got to actually want to do something, his ratings were 70% to 80%. He couldn't have gone to war with 30% in. And then look what happened--how hard it was when he had a draft. By the way, one of the things that I notice now with reporters — I was alive when in 1955 or '56. Remember when the Selective Service announced the draft? I mean, how bad was that politically? And so, the same thing happened to Putin. A lot of people do not want to go to war if they don't think it's rational. And that certainly happened in Russia. But the tone of us from the very beginning actually made it easier for Putin politically to have a viable (reason to go to war). And he survived politically.

**Ralph Nader:** Not to mention the history of two massive invasions in the 20th Century from the Western frontier into Russia, which took over 50 million lives. Can we let Steve and David in on this? Pretty much want a comment on this side.

**Steve Skrovan:** Yeah. Mr. Hersh, it seems like the most significant excuse, critique or excuse - whatever you want to call it - for the mainstream media not to pick this up is that it only comes from one source. How would you respond to that?

**Seymour Hersh:** I would say why don't you look carefully at what I wrote about – the details, the specifics. And I will tell you, if it had been two sources, it would have been “unnamed sources,” they would have complained about “unnamed sources.” That's been the pattern. And it changed a lot. When I was doing stuff for *The New Yorker* all during Bush and Cheney, after they responded to 9/11 by deciding we had to attack Iraq -- which is run by a country that hates the radical Sunnis as much as the White House did. And then they also went after Bashar Assad

who, as his father demonstrated, hated the Sunni radicals as much as anybody else in the West; anyway, it's so crazy what we did -- I wrote stories galore about that without naming sources, and that wasn't a problem. But when we got Obama, it was this shocking sort of thing to me, how quickly the mainstream press fell in line. And there were stories I did where all of a sudden, the source issue was a big problem.

When I did the story about domestic spying, I had seven unnamed sources, and nobody said "boo". Nobody worried about it. But then, when Obama took out Bin Laden, I was criticized bitterly for my terrible reporting on it and using unnamed sources. Because what I had the audacity to do--I didn't dispute the fact that Obama did it, that he authorized the raid and Bin Laden was killed--I just said everything else about it was a lie. Not a lie that he did it, but he was living as a captive of the intelligence service of the Pakistani military. And when he was captured, they put out stories that he had two women in front of him with AK-47s and that he had \$900 in euro currency sown into the lining in one of his coats. And there was one time they put out something about him watching TV and the pitch they were giving the press was they thought he was doing pornography; they saw pornography in his room. It's just crazy the lying they did. And so, I wrote about that, and it shocked everybody. There was such criticism of me for daring to suggest that my God (Obama lied), this guy who kept the Afghan war going and who said he'd close Guantanamo and never did - which has been then and now the largest source of enormous hatred of America in many parts of the world and probably a better recruiting tool than anything else. Anyway, he said two days after his election he would close it down, but he didn't, and he kept the Afghan war going. He didn't stop that either. And so, I saw he was a very defective president, and that's the minority position.

**Ralph Nader:** We've been talking with Sy Hersh, author of the ground-breaking story, *the Nord Stream pipeline and how the US government destroyed it*. And it's all on his Substack, Sy Hersh, S-Y H-E-R-S-H.

**Seymour Hersh:** All right, Ralph. Thank you. Goodbye, guys.

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

**Steve Skrovan:** We've been speaking with Seymour Hersh. We have a link to his work at [ralphnaderradiohour.com](http://ralphnaderradiohour.com). Speaking of censored stories, up next, Mickey Huff joins us to talk about the top censored stories from last year. But first, let's take a quick break to 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, February 24, 2023. I'm Russell Mokhiber.

OSHA last week fined Mars Wrigley more than \$14,000 after two of its employees fell into a large tub of chocolate. Two workers last June landed in the tub at the Mars Wrigley factory in Elizabethtown, Pennsylvania. Neither worker sustained injuries as they tumbled into a tank partially filled with chocolate as they carried out maintenance work. That's according to a report from *The Guardian*. The tank was reportedly waist-high in chocolate and first responders had to help cut a hole in the tank to free the workers who were unable to get themselves out. It's not

clear how the workers fell in. "The employer did not ensure the employees had the knowledge of the type and magnitude of the energy for the task," an OSHA spokesperson 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 and Ralph. What's the state of the free press? David?

**David Feldman:** Mickey Huff is the director of Project Censored and the founder and host of *The Project Censored Show*, a weekly syndicated public affairs program. He is professor of social science, history, and journalism at Diablo Valley College, where he co-chairs the history area and is chair of the journalism department. He has authored and edited several books, including *United States of Distraction: Media Manipulation in Post-Truth America: (and What We Can Do About It)*, as well as *Let's Agree to Disagree*, and *Project Censored's "State of the Free Press 2023: The News That Didn't Make the News—And Why*. Welcome back to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*, Mickey Huff.

**Mickey Huff:** Thanks so much. It's always an honor and a pleasure to be here with you all and with Ralph.

**Ralph Nader:** Thank you, Mickey. Project Censored comes out every year and it started in 1976. So, this is the new *State of the Free Press 2023 of Project Censored* by you, edited by you and Andy Lee Roth. Indicate right off, it is more than just both of you. You actually have students working on selecting and referring different stories. So before we get into how you actually do it, how do you define a censored story? It's a very rigorous process, I understand.

**Mickey Huff:** Indeed it is, Ralph. And as you said, we've been doing this since 1976 from our founder, Carl Jensen, and communications followed up 20 years later by Peter Phillips in sociology. And then we expanded the program well beyond Sonoma State to some 20 different colleges that rotate around every year. And we'll talk about that process a little bit later but to the core of it, what do we mean by censorship? Since its inception, Project Censored has always defined censorship as anything that interferes with the free flow of information in the society that purports to have free press systems. And so we don't just believe that prior restraint is the only form of censorship as it's defined legally. We have long argued that there are far more insidious forms and pernicious forms of censorship that occur regularly that are more censorship by proxy from corporate media or legacy media companies. And then of course any degree of spin or propaganda or half-truth kind of reporting is also a different kind of censorship. Reporting that is based on fallacious straw person or ad hominem arguments is also another way to censor important stories and information getting out by spinning the direction away from a topic and onto a person. So we're really interested in all things that look like censorship, from book banning to curricular control, as well as suppression and non-reporting or distortion of news stories.

**Ralph Nader:** And the role of students, which I find pretty exciting.

**Mickey Huff:** It's extraordinary because it's not enough to just call these things out, which we also, we don't just call out the failures of the corporate press. We do laud them when they do a good job because they have resources to do it, and the major media outlets do report on important things. It's not that they never do. But we also lionize the independent and alternative

press for doing the good work they do on the shoestring budgets, and in our estimation, often do a far better job than the behemoth organizations. But beyond that, it's not just important to call that out and to do the things that way that we do with the book, the radio and everything every year. Your listeners can go to [projectcensored.org](http://projectcensored.org) to learn more. But we are also purveyors and proponents of critical media literacy education and curriculum.

So we teach media literacy, news literacy. We're not interested in telling people what to think. We are trying to help people understand how to think about media critically, how to diversify their media habits and diet, and how they can understand what the biases are or the intentions are of the many outlets that are available. And I don't just mean the legacy outlets or even the internet outlets or big popular podcasts and these types of things or networks, I mean across the spectrum. And that means also looking at news outlets that have an obvious bias. We don't shy away from the fact that bias exists, we simply need to understand what it is, where it comes from, and how it might skew or frame information. And so we try to, in all of our publications and our curriculum and the courses we teach, et cetera, we try to instill in students a sense of self-empowerment so that they can understand how to navigate the very complicated sort of news media ecosystem we have, which is also a minefield of mis- and disinformation.

But we don't believe it's our role to tell people what is mis- or disinformation. We're supposed to teach people how they can start to figure out fact from fiction on their own because once we do that, we then are planting the seeds so that we can grow not just a more well-educated or intelligent population able to meaningfully participate in civil society, but really also to go on to maybe even become a better and more transparent media that reports what's happening, reports the facts and sort of lets the chips fall where they may. And we have a lot of success in those programs.

**Ralph Nader:** Well, before we get into some of the hundred articles that you have here and be more specific about what you're saying, there are also good books that expose things that are censored out just as a process of mainstream media not wanting to review them. I mean, we've had over 60 authors of great books in the last few years and not more than a couple of them have been reviewed by the *New York Times* book review section or by the daily *New York Times*, just to pick one example. So, it's not just articles that could be written and haven't been written, but it's also in the field of books that are written and then blocked out.

Here's a good example. You read about this Norfolk Southern Railway toxic spill, this massive spill in Eastern Ohio over two weeks ago, and usually the Federal Railroad Administration under the Secretary of Transportation gets press attention, especially since it's been taken over for decades by the railroad industry. They've put their own people in, they write their own diluted standards for safety and operation, et cetera. But the Secretary of Transportation, Peter Buttigieg, he was AWOL. Usually, they rush to the scene. And he doesn't want to be exposed to the fumes like thousands of people were and are, so he's basically sitting in Washington. And after 11 or 12 days, someone asked him, "Are you going out, Mr. Secretary, to visit like the head of the EPA went out, Mr. Regan?" And he said, "Yeah, I intend to go out, but I haven't set a date yet." Now, that to me, Mickey, would be an invitation for a story. Why would a presidential aspirant who goes all over the country cutting ribbons on public infrastructure projects not want to go out to Eastern Ohio? But there's no follow up. We're satisfied with him saying, "Yeah, I'm going to go

out but I haven't set a date yet," and it's been over two weeks. So anyway, that's just a comment, a side here.

**Mickey Huff:** If I might, I grew up within an hour of there, so I'm very familiar with that part of the country. I have family there, I know people that have been visiting there to try to find out what's happening, and the stories are not pleasant. It's also "Mayor Pete", "Mayo Pete" that's basically said there's going to be more derailments. The Biden administration has tried to put this on Trump, the lobbyists, the regulatory capture which is of course an issue when the Trump administration undid some of the Obama-Biden era safety regulations. But the Biden administration is two years in and they have yet to reverse the Trump reversal. And then when you have Biden running off to Ukraine, Pete can't be bothered with it. One of the EPA higher-ups was supposed to go on a junket to Africa, it was Idris Elba, and then as soon as they found out that that was happening, they had to cancel and say, Oh no, I'm going to East Palestine in Ohio instead. It's a frightful, frightful story, Ralph. And it took that disaster for the *New York Times* to bother to notice that there are some thousand derailments a year.

**Ralph Nader:** It's very interesting. The press over the years hasn't really covered railroad safety derailments. There have been thousands of them in the last 15 years. They get local coverage but the Federal Railroad Administration doesn't get anywhere near the coverage of the FAA, for example, or the EPA. They go through poor areas and cities, that's where the trains go through antiquated braking systems, minimal stuff, they've been cutting the staff in the railroads while they're reporting huge profits and huge executive compensation. It's almost a class situation. It's like they're out of sight, out of mind. But this one isn't and this one I hope will generate far more investigative reporting.

**Mickey Huff:** Ralph, this goes back to Pullman. I mean, this is an age-old story. This is not a new story, sadly. I mean, the technology of the brakes are about as old as the struggles of the laborers being abused. And let's not forget last December that Biden intervened and disrupted the workers of the railway so that they could not continue with their plans to strike over many issues, including safety issues like this very one. So this is a bipartisan disaster. It's a direct example of what happens with regulatory capture and it shows once again the gross failure of the corporate media to cover balloons and the Super Bowl and a bunch of other distractions instead of things that really matter to working class Americans, including in the Rust Belt of this country.

**Ralph Nader:** Well, let's talk about some of the specifics. I just want to give people a sense. This is a very convenient book, listeners. You almost have a compilation at your hand of tremendous variety of stories. For example, and I'll just read some of the titles, Fossil Fuel Industry Subsidized at Rate of \$11 Million a Minute, that's by the taxpayer. \$11 million a minute to subsidize ExxonMobil, Chevron and other giants. ExxonMobil just, in effect, admitted they didn't know what to do with \$50 billion, so they bought back their stock. Fifty billion, with a B, dollars, and they're still being subsidized. Here's one. Wage Theft: US Businesses Suffer Few Consequences for Stealing Millions from Workers Every Year. They owe workers wages and they say, "get lost," usually to very low-income workers that don't know how to fight or can't fight back. EPA Withheld Reports on Dangerous Chemicals. That's a contrarian insight. I didn't know that. How about this one – Concerns for Journalistic Independence as Gates Foundation Gives \$319 million to news outlets, all kinds of news outlets, including NPR and newspapers around the country.

Well, they need the money but what kind of quid pro quo is there either quietly or not so quietly. Gates is for nuclear power, for example. He's all for unregulated genetic engineering. People get the message. Here's one: CIA Discussed Plans to Kidnap or Kill Julian Assange, hasn't been very widely reported. Here's one: Repression of Palestinian Media. That shouldn't be a surprise to anyone. Here's one. Poor Infrastructure, a Legacy of Discriminatory Redlining Inhibits Rural Black Americans Internet Access. Another one. School-Issued Technology Poses Surveillance Risks for Students. You have an article on States Hoard Federal Assistance Funding Amidst Record Poverty Levels. You have a little longer one. Talk about this one. This is Sam Husseini, who works in the National Press Building. And he had three, four pages where he described his effort to ask tough questions confronting politicians in Washington. And he speaks about that. Why don't you describe that?

**Mickey Huff:** Yeah, thanks, Ralph. I appreciate it. And you're running down the laundry list of this year's top 25 stories. Your listeners can check them out for free at [projectcensored.org](http://projectcensored.org). And we link to all the great independent reporters that did all of those stories. And just to tie it back really quickly, these are researched by students and overseen by faculty at colleges across the country in the process of teaching people how to be news media literate. The students and professors also look and try to help them find these important stories, where do they look for them when they're not in the corporate or legacy press. And then they learn how to use databases, they learn how to look for coverage. They learn research skills that are really integral to almost any area that they're going to go into in their careers even outside of journalism.

But back to Sam Husseini questioning politicians at news conferences and underutilized antidote to censorship, who would have thought, Ralph, that asking questions of people in power, probing questions to hold them accountable is a, well, primary way of uncensoring information by forcing public officials to go on the record about what they do or don't know about key issues of the day. And Husseini is a veteran, as you say, from the Washington press corps, and he himself has been censored many, many times, including I think most notably, at least where people may know more about him, was the Helsinki Trump-Putin conference when he was trying to ask about the nuclear weapons ban issue. And he was escorted out because he had a sign that was trying to ask this. So you're not allowed to ask the tough questions, Ralph. And anybody that's been in the press pool long enough knows that. They don't have to be told that. The censorship doesn't have to be directly from the government or even from the corporate owners. Reporters know that if they ask questions that don't get answered too often and get overlooked, they're going to get yanked. They're going to get called back to the office. They might end up losing their jobs because they don't have copy, they don't have stories.

And Husseini points this out in a great part of our book. Now, this isn't on our website, but it is in the book, *State of the Press 2023*. There's a chapter that we call Media Democracy in Action. In a lot of ways, Ralph, I think it's modeled after some of the great examples that you've shown for so many years with your PIRGs and other things. We highlight individuals and organizations that are doing strong and important First Amendment work that is often not recognized or is not touted in the corporate press, but it is an integral component of our free press system. Husseini talks about the history of his Washington stakeout, which was a project that he had years and years ago where he would literally try to follow people around and ask them questions and catch them coming out of meetings and these kind of things. In another instance, interestingly enough, he actually talked to Helen Thomas, the late great Helen Thomas in the White House press pool

about why people don't ask more questions about Israel-Palestine. Well, interestingly enough, she eventually ended up asking such questions and then was overlooked thereafter. Basically, kind of like a de facto demotion for asking tough questions. Hussein's been on another really big story, Ralph, that didn't get a lot of attention, but it has since kind of recurred, it's come back a little bit is that at the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic, because it was during the Trump administration, many in the liberal press, didn't even bother to investigate where the virus came from, how it might have happened. It just didn't seem to matter to them, and anything Trump said was a lie and a falsehood. And a year later, even major figures of the *Columbia Journalism Review* and other places said, that the press should have investigated the inception. They should be investigating things like the Gain-of-Function research. They should be questioning some of the things coming out of the, not just Trump but Biden administration on these affairs. And Hussein's really been dogged about trying to find out because these issues truly matter. They're a matter of public health. We know, Ralph, that public health issues have been captured by Big Pharma and other major interests so Hussein is right to ask these kinds of critical questions.

**Ralph Nader:** Well, look at what he's asking about Iraq. The 20th anniversary of Bush and Cheney's criminal invasion of Iraq, illegal, unconstitutional and under false pretenses — they never had weapons of mass destruction — took Hussein's attention. He asked Senator Chuck Schumer of New York, — the US should pay reparations to Iraq for the invasion. He asked Colin Powell, When did he find out that the evidence he cited for Iraq's weapons of mass destruction had been based on a false confession extracted through torture? Those are the kind of questions that made more of the official Washington shun Sam Hussein when he was asking. He asked a deficit hawk member of Congress why there was a tax on bandages but not on complex Wall Street transactions. How about that one? And the 20th anniversary comes up of the invasion on Iraq on March 19th, listeners; there's going to be a program on that, but encourage members of the press not to forget that 20th anniversary. That was a massive war crime. Over a million innocent Iraqis died, country destroyed, fallen apart to this day, and Bush and Cheney are luxuriating in the US without any accountability whatsoever. There's a lot of talk now on the first anniversary of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, but very little talk about the US in its sociocide destruction of the Iraqi people. And I think that illustrates how important it is to ask questions on subjects that have been taboo or censored or what have you.

Just to continue some of the articles, you have something called the Critical Media Literacy Conference of the Americas. You're really going into showing young people, students, adults how to be more critical and nuanced in evaluating the media which, after all, radio and TV corporations use the public airways, we're the landlords, they're the tenants and they control 24/7 who says what and who doesn't, and they get the license free from the FCC. It's free. Your auto license is not free. It's actually more in dollars than what the biggest TV station in New York City pays to use your property. Go ahead.

**Mickey Huff:** Indeed, Ralph. And at the crux of both the WMDs in Iraq and Russia Ukraine is that there was colossal media failure across the spectrum – biased reporting, false reporting – and they've never really had to pay any consequences for that, just like the media outlets don't have to pay to use our airways while they rake in billions of dollars. The Critical Media Literacy Conference of the Americas — Nolan Higdon, my good friend and colleague, is one of the forces behind that, based on a lot of the critical pedagogy of the great Paulo Freire, and that's where we get the critical and media literacy. And every year we put together this large conference. It was

the third annual last year and it's North, Central and South America, so it's a very diverse conference in that regard, where we talk about not just, again, failures of media but we talk about strategies for creating a true bottom-up people's media, grassroots media. We talk about the role that public education can and should play in media dissemination and filling news deserts.

And it's free, by the way. This conference is free to be attended by students. We were using hybrid technologies so that people could attend from all over, several continents and all over the world. And the core of it, Ralph, is that we believe that people possess the mental capabilities to understand the complex lives and complex society in which we live. But we have to teach people how the systems work. We have to show people what a free press system looks like. We have to model civic engagement, not just abstractly talk about it like just going and voting every couple of years. And the Critical Media Literacy Conference of the Americas really embodies that and I think fuses the significance of civic engagement and critical media literacy as a means of moving forward as an antidote to the great neoliberal regulatory capture and deconstruction of our media system and our educational system. And Ralph, you wrote the foreword to our book, Nolan and I, *United States of Distraction*, that talks all about how that's happened over the last 50 years, how we got here and what we can do about it. And this conference every fall is really dedicated to what we can do about it and we showcase people who are doing something about it. And it's truly media democracy in action.

**Ralph Nader:** Well, to show another aspect of this book, we're talking with Mickey Huff who's one of the co-editors, two co-editors, Andy Lee Roth, of this paperback, *State of the Free Press* by Project Censored since 1976, and it's the 2023 edition with fresh examples of censored stories. It's also not just the facts that may be censored but it's the weaving of a larger theme that's censored. And what jumps out in your book is on page 113 where you have a look at the established media's failure to report corporate interference with basic human biology. What do you mean by that?

**Mickey Huff:** This is part of our *Déjà vu News* chapter, Ralph, and it goes way back to the beginning of the project. It wasn't enough to just highlight the underreported or censored stories every year. We wanted to show patterns, the types of stories that tend to be underreported, and the history of their very underreporting. So what we do in the *Déjà vu News* chapter that Steve Macek has been doing for us for a number of years with Shealeigh Voith and other Project Censored researchers, and it goes back and asks, what has happened to previous underreported stories? And this year, they looked thematically at eating and drinking, birthing and breastfeeding. They looked at the corporate interference in reporting about us as being humans. And they went back and looked at one of our stories that goes back a couple of years to microplastics and toxic chemicals, the forever chemicals.

So a couple few years ago, these were widely underreported stories that now are coming to the fore. And by the way, in that train wreck disaster in Eastern Ohio we're seeing more of the problems of these kinds of forever chemicals that get into the ecosystem and never go away and cause mass catastrophe. Another one of these stories, Ralph, is *Global Food Cartel Fast Becoming World Supermarket*. This was from 2005. It's even worse now. The same kind of corporate conglomeration that we see taking place in the media is happening in food production. It's happening across the spectrum. So what they're showing is a pattern of corporate control and they're showing that even 20 years later, stories that were once censored sometimes still languish

in obscurity. The World Bank and Multinational Corporations Seek to Privatize Water, Nestlé. That's still a huge story. This is still happening and not getting the kind of attention that it deserves, Ralph.

**Ralph Nader:** We're talking with Mickey Huff, the co-editor of *Project Censored's State of the Free Press 2023*. Before we run out of time, Mickey, you've just touched on another dimension that needs to be paid attention to. And that is, even when there's massive coverage by the mainstream press year after year after year, like the Nestlé Corporation misleading mothers in the Third World with TV ads, trying to persuade them that breastfeeding is antiquated, is inconvenient and they're much better off with infant formula, and because when they buy it, they can't keep buying it, so they adulterate it with water and the water from the village may be contaminated, and the infant comes down with fatal dysentery. And we're talking about hundreds of thousands of deaths in a given year back when it was covered even more intensively than it is now. And nothing happened. So the next question for future inquiry, Mickey Huff, is when the mainstream press covers it and covers it and covers it, and the corporations basically are immune and act with impunity — they own police on the corporate crime beat, namely the federal regulatory agencies. So what do we do? What's the next step? And I don't expect you to answer that right now, but I just want to put that on the table because a lot of people think if only the sunshine of media exposure would alight on these bad deeds, things would change. Not necessarily. Any final thoughts?

**Mickey Huff:** Absolutely, Ralph. That's part of the process. We have to know in order to know how and what to act upon. You covered this in your book, *Breaking Through Power*, which I still use in my political economy class. It's a how-to book to pressure government to be civically engaged. We have to be informed first with facts and information, which is why the alternative independent media is so important, but we also need to be educated about civics and about how to engage and how to push back against the corporate control and regulatory capture that we've seen. But it took us years and years and years, decades to get here, Ralph, and it's going to take a while to get out. But we can't give up. This is why people have such a low opinion of the press. This is why people don't know where to go to get information. This media literacy crisis is because the corporate media has failed the public in large part, and then they even throw up their arms and say, we told you and you didn't do anything about it, without ever pulling back the curtain to show why it's very difficult for us to be engaged and to actually change what's going on in Washington.

**Ralph Nader:** We need a strong democracy at the grassroots to make media coverage have legs toward change. And we need prosecutors who prosecute, citizen groups who mobilize on Congress and state legislatures, et cetera. Anyway, that's for another time. How do people get in touch with you?

**Mickey Huff:** Well, I'd love to hear from your listeners, Ralph, with ideas for stories or any other things they'd like to talk about. It's [projectcensored.org](http://projectcensored.org). Mickey, like the mouse, [@projectcensored.org](https://twitter.com/projectcensored). And check out our publishing imprint, *The Censored Press*. It's [censoredpress.org](http://censoredpress.org). We just did *Media and Me*, critical media literacy book for young people, with our partners at Seven Stories. And we have two books coming out next month, Ralph. Kevin Gosztola's book, *Guilty of Journalism* on the case against Julian Assange, the political case against Assange. And another book by Adam Bessie and Pete Glanting, *Going Remote* on what's happening to education as a result of going remote during the pandemic. And so two great

books coming out from the Censored Press next month. And onward we go. You can listen to a podcast of *The Project Censored Show* every week on Pacifica Radio. And thanks for having me here, Ralph. It's always a pleasure and an honor to be with you.

**Ralph Nader:** You're welcome. Mickey Huff on the run, producing day after day, year after year, never gets discouraged. Thank you very much, Mickey Huff, co-editor of the new book, *Project Censored's State of the Free Press 2023*. Give it to your libraries; give it to your book club gathering; give it to your youngsters who need to read and think. Thank you.

**Mickey Huff:** Thank you.

**Steve Skrovan:** We have been speaking with Mickey Huff. We have a link to *Project Censored's State of the Free Press 2023* at [ralphnaderradiohour.com](http://ralphnaderradiohour.com). I want to thank our guests again, Seymour Hersh and Mickey Huff. For those of you listening on the radio, that's our show. For you podcast listeners, stay tuned for some bonus material and we got a lot of it, including a postmortem. Mickey does with us about Seymour Hersh. And we call that "The Wrap Up". A transcript of this program will appear on the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour* Substack site soon after the episode is posted.

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

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

**David Feldman:** We have a new issue of the *Capitol Hill Citizen*. It's out now. To order your copy of the *Capitol Hill Citizen*, "Democracy Dies in Broad Daylight", go to [capitolhillcitizen.com](http://capitolhillcitizen.com). The producers of the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour* are Jimmy Lee Wirt and Matthew Marran. Our executive producer is Alan Minsky.

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

**David Feldman:** Join us next week on the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour* when we'll talk about how red state leaders have failed their citizens and undermined America, with William Kleinknecht, author of the new book, *States of Neglect*. Thank you, Ralph.

**Ralph Nader:** Thank you. Members of the Congress Club, keep sending us what response you have to your letters on corporate crime enforcement from your senators or representatives.