

Ralph Nader Radio Hour

Episode 509

“Democracy Dies in Broad Daylight”

December 9th, 2023

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

David Feldman: Good morning.

Steve Skrovan: And of course, it wouldn't be a show without the man of the hour, Ralph Nader. Hello, Ralph.

Ralph Nader: Hello. This is about the *Capitol Hill Citizen* newspaper that we started and its contents in the current edition. Get ready for a fascinating presentation.

Steve Skrovan: On today's program, we have three guests talking about three different topics, all of which are featured in the latest edition of the *Capitol Hill Citizen*.

First up is Marion Nestle. She is professor of Nutrition, Food Studies, and Public Health, Emerita, at New York University. Her research examines scientific and socioeconomic influences on food choice, obesity, and food safety, with an emphasis on the role of the food industry's influence. We're going to talk to her about the junk food lobby and how it contributes to obesity in America. It turns out when Americans eat less, the food industry gets queasy.

Then we're going to talk to our good friend and resident constitutional scholar Bruce Fein. Bruce, Ralph, and fellow legal expert Lou Fisher have written an open letter to congressional staffers, reminding them that Congress commands awesome powers. In recent years, we've seen Congress abdicate some of its most important duties and hand power over to the executive branch. Congressional offices are besieged by corporate lobbyists who are trying to hijack whatever influence Congress has left. So what are Ralph, Lou Fisher, and Bruce Fein asking staffers to do about it? We'll find out.

Finally, we welcome Vishal Shankar of the Revolving Door Project. He was interviewed for the article in the *Capitol Hill Citizen* that asked, “Is President Biden okay with letting Postmaster General Louis DeJoy wreck the Post Office. Biden had the chance to makeover the entire Post Office board and fire DeJoy, who has spent his tenure dismantling mail sorting machines, cutting worker overtime, restricting deliveries, removing mailboxes, and doing just about everything he can to slow down the mail. Mr. Shankar will offer his insights about why this has happened and what can be done about it.

As always, somewhere in the midst of all that, we'll check in with our steadfast corporate crime reporter, Russell Mokhiber. But first, let's talk about the junk food lobby. David?

David Feldman: Marion Nestle is the Paulette Goddard Professor of Nutrition, Food Studies, and Public Health, Emerita, at New York University. She is the author of a wide range of books about the politics of food, nutrition, health, and the environment, including *Eat, Drink, Vote: An Illustrated Guide to Food Politics*, *Unsavory Truth: How Food Companies Skew the Science of What We Eat*, and *Slow Cooked: An Unexpected Life in Food Politics*.

Welcome to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*, Marion Nestle.

Marion Nestle: Glad to be here.

Ralph Nader: Yeah. Welcome indeed, Marion. To head up our program today, which is going to be about our special newspaper that we started last year, called the *Capitol Hill Citizen*. There's an article on page one, Marion, called "Fat Accompli: Junk food lobby in control inside the Beltway", meaning the Congress. And you're widely quoted throughout.

The article illustrates that the situation is worse than I've ever seen, even though we've had a lot of documentation in your books, for example, articles, interviews, the work over the years by the Center for Science in the Public Interest, so I'm not pessimistic about what has happened in the past. But as usual, the giant food industry and the drug industry counterattack. They beef up their lobbyists on Capitol Hill and they block legislation.

Can you give us an up-to-date survey on what's going on in Congress by the good guys, what kind of opposition is there, and how this fat food lobby has influenced the public health institutions in this country?

Marion Nestle: We're in a situation in which the vast majority of American adults are overweight or obese, which means that they're at higher-than-average risk for chronic diseases such as heart disease, type 2 diabetes, certain kinds of cancers and other problems. They're at high risk for COVID-19 bad outcomes. Yet, there's no federal program and no federal campaign to try to help people prevent gaining excess weight.

And the reason for this seems to me to be pretty simple. And that is that eating less is really bad for business. If you want to prevent obesity, you have to eat less or choose foods that are healthier for you, but for sure, take in fewer calories. And doing that is hugely bad for the food industry that has done every single thing that it can to get people to eat more.

It has created what I call an "eat more food" environment. And the reasons for that trace back to 1980, when President Reagan was elected and deregulated a lot of controls on industry marketing, particularly marketing food to children. And then also to the shareholder value movement, which started in the early 1980s and has been widely adopted in the United States, which says that the purpose of corporations is to make money for stockholders and that social purposes are bad for business.

And that's in an environment in which there are twice as many calories available in the US food supply—roughly 4,000 a day per capita, men, women and little tiny babies. That's twice what the population needs on average. Food companies have to operate in a hugely overproduced food environment, and there's lots of politics behind that. And they have to figure out how to sell their products in this overproduced marketplace in which they are required by Wall Street to not only make a profit, but to increase their profits every 90 days. That's an unsustainable situation.

Ralph Nader: I think it is a sustainable situation because we can't seem to break it. Obesity leads to shortened lifespan, as you've shown again and again. It leads to all kinds of ailments including youth diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease, and they want obesity.

Not only are they selling these children stuff that tastes good, superficially, “turning their tongues against their brains,” as my mother used to say, to get them to buy the junk food, which is very high in salt, fat and sugar, but they want them to be obese, to eat more food when they're obese. Isn't that right?

Marion Nestle: If you want to make a profit and grow your profit every 90 days, you have to sell as much food as possible. And what that food does to public health is not your responsibility because that's the way our system works.

The best example of what's going on is these new obesity drugs, where studies are coming out that the maker of the main drugs, Novo Nordisk, has put hundreds of millions of dollars into gifts for health and nutrition and obesity specialist influencers, to try to get those drugs onto the market as quickly as possible. They cost a lot of money. And the food industry is reacting to these drugs as, "Wait a minute, if people are on these drugs, they're not going to want our products."

The other aspect of this that's so interesting is that the category of foods that are now called ultra-processed, and hugely overproduced. This is a relatively new term, that refers to a specific category of junk foods that are industrially produced, using industrially extracted ingredients that are really high in calorie density that often, but not always have a lot of sugar, salt and fat in it. These foods are best exemplified by corn chips with huge, lengthy ingredient lists. We now have a controlled clinical trial, which shows that people who are eating these foods take in more calories without realizing it.

Some people think these foods are addictive. I'm not sure they meet the precise definition of addictive, but certainly when people start eating them, they can't stop. And foods have been deliberately formulated to do that. So the whole system is setup to try to get people to eat as much of these extremely profitable products as they can. This is all about business, and nothing to do with public health, except the negative part of it.

Ralph Nader: What kind of lobby is there on Congress reflecting what you think should be done, which has been documented for years? We know what food is nutritious and what food is also delicious. We know about the Mediterranean diet There are a lot of studies on that. There's a huge amount of information, and some of it is getting to people around the country. But it seems like Congress is off the charts here. They're not having the kind of hearings they used to have. Tell us

about the lobby and how they've neutralized a lot of public health institutions that you've worked with.

Marion Nestle: The system works in the classic way. Food companies, give donations to congressional candidates, mostly Republicans these days, in very large amounts of money. They can do that through various kinds of organizations. The Supreme Court has said you can't put a limit on these kinds of things. And they also hire lobbyists who are paid very well to work full time to inform Congress about the interests of these particular companies.

And there's a website called Open Secrets that, as a public service, reports these kinds of things. And I'm a consumer of Open Secrets. And I'm on that site looking at the number of lobbyists that the soft drink industry employs, for example. Sixty to eighty people are paid full time to talk to members of Congress about the interests of these particular companies. They have to report the topics on which they're lobbying, but they don't have to say what their position is. You have to infer that from other information, but you can pretty well guess.

Ralph Nader: They're also going after minority populations, like they fight control on sugared drinks, saying it discriminates against poor people. And in the *Capitol Hill Citizen*, they say in October 2022, that Novo Nordisk sponsored a Congressional Black Caucus Foundation panel to discuss why Medicare should cover expensive obesity drugs like Novo Nordisk's Wegovy and Ozempic (generic name for both is Semaglutide, an adult injectable prescription). Talk how they're going after low-income people and the groups that are supposed to defend them and pumping all kinds of money into their foundations.

Marion Nestle: I wrote a book called *Soda Politics* that has a chapter relating this history. It's a very complicated history, because years ago, decades ago, the black community was petitioning sugar-sweetened beverage companies to hire them and to advertise in their publications.

And Martin Luther King, in the speech that he gave the night before he was assassinated, asked his followers to boycott Coca-Cola because Coca-Cola wasn't hiring and advertising in black publications. Well, that was before obesity and its consequences became a really big problem in the black as well as every other community. And certainly, when Mayor Bloomberg in New York tried to put a cap on the size of sugar-sweetened beverages sold in New York City, the black community supported the soda industry in that battle because they had a long relationship with the soda industry, and very strong financial ties, and also because the Bloomberg administration had not approached the black community to discuss this with them. As I said, it's a very complicated question.

But if your job is to sell sugar-sweetened beverages, you don't care who you sell them to. Sell them to everybody. And they don't cost very much so that you can advertise them in black and Latino and other minority communities. You can sponsor the heroes—the sports and music heroes of those communities. You can fund playgrounds. You can fund programs in schools. You can do everything that you possibly can get away with.

Ralph Nader: Let's show our listeners how bad the situation is since 1980 in terms of the number of people considered obese, defined as a BMI of 30 or higher. Is this accurate? More than 7 out of 10 Americans are overweight or obese, and more than 4 out of 10 are obese.

Marion Nestle: Yeah, those are correct figures from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) that roughly 70% of American adults are overweight.

Ralph Nader: What about teenagers?

Marion Nestle: The percentages are lower but rising. People gain weight as they get older. They become more sedentary, and metabolism drops. So it gets harder and harder to reduce your food intake to the point where you're not gaining weight.

Metabolism is really set up to make it as difficult as possible to maintain a healthy weight, especially in an environment where you're confronted with yummy foods all the time, everywhere. And the environment has been set up so that it is okay to eat anyplace you want to, anytime, night or day, and in very large portions.

Ralph Nader: Why aren't the public health groups screaming about the junk food crisis in America?

Marion Nestle: A lot of public health people are. And there's an enormous effort to talk about commercial determinants of health, commercial determinants of *poor* health, to talk about ultra-processed foods, and the need to either stop their production or certainly get people to consume less of them, and to get people to eat smaller portions of foods.

Part of it is that the issue of calories is something that's very complicated for people to understand. It's much easier for people to understand fat and carbohydrate when, in fact, it doesn't matter whether your diet is high in fat or high in carbohydrate. What matters is how many calories you're consuming. And if you want to lose weight, you could lose weight on almost any kind of diet if you reduce the calories you're consuming.

But dieting is no fun. Food is wonderful. It's one of life's greatest pleasure. There's a lot of it around. It doesn't cost very much. You may think it costs very much, but relative to other kinds of commodities, there's a huge policy effort to keep the cost of food low, to the point where farmers, can hardly make a living. I mean, real farmers, not industrial farmers.

Ralph Nader: At what point do we have to get the criminal laws involved here? We're dealing here with premature death, an enormous increase in illnesses at an early age, and the projections for diabetes for the whole population is too scary even to talk about over the next 30 years.

Marion Nestle: What you're talking about is a problem fundamentally in Congress. In 1979, you may remember that the Federal Trade Commission attempted to do something that, to me, seemed like the mildest thing in the world. They were going to restrict the advertising of junk food to kids on television. And the pushback on that was so severe that the head of the Federal Trade Commission was fired and Congress passed a law. We have a law on the books that says that the Federal Trade Commission can do nothing to restrict the marketing of foods to children on television. They're not allowed to do that.

So what we're talking about here is a situation in which Congress is so corrupt that it cannot take on anything that will fight the food industry. This is corruption at the highest level, which is why when I'm asked, "If I were the czarina of food, what would I do?" my first answer is *get money out of politics*.

Ralph Nader: Thank you very much. We've been speaking with Professor Marion Nestle, who has written all kinds of materials exposing the fast food and junk food lobby for decades.

Marion Nestle: Bye. Thanks, everybody.

Steve Skrovan: We've been speaking with Marion Nestle. We will link to her work at ralphnaderradiohour.com.

Now we're going to quickly segue into our next segment, which features Bruce Fein and the letter he, Lou Fisher, and Ralph wrote to congressional staffers that is featured in the *Capitol Hill Citizen*. David?

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

Bruce Fein: Thank you for that wonderful introduction.

Ralph Nader: Bruce, before we get to an article in the *Capitol Hill Citizen* that we composed, called "An Open Letter to the Congressional Staff", I want to tell our listeners that you have a long article in the same edition of *Capitol Hill Citizen*, titled "Congress Shall Have the Power to Declare War." which it has given up to the president, regardless of party, who can start wars just by presidential fiat, as both Democrat and Republican presidents have done in the last few decades.

And this is very serious, in your judgment, because if Congress retains the power to declare war and has public hearings, the history has been that Congress is much more reluctant to start wars than the person in the White House. And that was exactly the vision and anticipation of the Founders who wrote the *Constitution*, especially James Madison, who thought that putting the war-making power in the legislature instead of the White House, another King George, possibly, was one of the greatest achievements in that big, hot room that summer in 1787 in Philadelphia.

So I urge our listeners to read Bruce's very detailed historic argument. Not only does Congress have the exclusive power, but we would have far fewer wars if Congress was required to take responsibility and hold public hearings.

You've testified over 200 times before Congress. Maybe it's a *Guinness Book of World Records*. I don't know. And you go up there all the time in one office after another, and you've been stunned by how inexperienced and ahistorical in terms of knowledge that the increasingly younger congressional staff have shown you. So you were one of the prompters of this open letter to congressional staff. Why is that important?

Bruce Fein: Ralph, it's important in major part because the members who come to Congress at present generally are clueless about their constitutional prerogatives, duties, responsibilities, because their entire lives, certainly since Korea, have been lived where the president basically decides everything, and Congress is a spectator on the scene. A phenomenon has grown more pronounced since the dissolution of the Soviet Union and then the huge expansion of the Military-Industrial (security) Complex that now captures well over 50% of all discretionary expenditures of the federal government. We've been in a permanent state of war since 9/11 with no end in sight.

And because of that, they need more and more people who are professional, who've been around for many years, so they have institutional memory. They can remember the Fulbright hearings on Vietnam that helped bring Vietnam War to a close. They can remember the [1975] Church Committee hearings on the national security state and all the lies. They can remember that there are ways in which you can have oversight of the executive without compromising security. You can have sessions in executive session that are secret or go in and visit some of the intelligence agency offices and take notes and get a real understanding of what's going on, because none of these things happen anymore.

It's very apparent to anybody who walks in and talks to the staff, typically chiefs of staff, legislative assistants, who are 25/26 years old—they're just out of law school at best, and they know very little. Because since Newt Gingrich became speaker in 1995, when Congress turned Republican, he downsized the legislative branch's resources. So you really can't make a career anymore in the legislative branch as an employee or as an aide. And so everybody leaves after a couple of years to go to K Street and become a lobbyist. And so with this rapid turnover, you have a lobotomized Congress.

And what this letter was attempting to communicate do was to say, *listen Congress still, when the architecture of the Constitution is honored, as the primary/predominant branch among the three branches*. Put simply, you're not exercising your full constitutional authority. You need to take the time and opportunity through tutorials that we offer—reading and studying—and then lobbying your member. You need to stand up and do X, Y, Z. Just one example we recently saw, was that we're giving unconditional assistance, weapons and otherwise to Israel in their campaign in Gaza against Hamas, no conditions, no debate, nothing. It just goes down.

So the members and the staff should be there. It's happened at the State Department. They should say this is not acceptable. We have to have a debate. There needs to be ~~kind of~~ lobbying the members. You need to get out there and do X, Y, Z. Because [congress] members spend a vast amount of time raising money, they're not reading the *Federalist Papers* or the various and sundry Geneva Conventions—the Convention Against Genocide, Convention Against Torture. So the congressional staff are essential.

The whole purpose of the letter is to say *you have a lot more power than you're exercising*. You should be energized to master the true authority of Congress and then exercise it, even if it means raising it with your boss.

Ralph Nader: My recent experience sitting in congressional offices is that staffers think of their role as valets. It's at a low point. And we tried to get them to read this book by Mike Pertschuk, the famous chief of staff for Senator Warren Magnuson in the '60s and '70s, who got so many wonderful consumer and environmental worker bills through Congress. He wrote a book in 2017, as you know, Bruce, called *When the Senate Worked for Us*, but you can't get anybody there to read it.

It's directed toward elevating the staff's role to become informed, to be key advisors for their senators and representatives, on major necessities of the American people and around the world. So what do you think can change here? Because more of the staff is coming from these K Street corporate lobbying firms. They park the staff with, for example, Republican senators and representatives. The staffers get a little on-the-job training, find out what's going on. Then they go back to their corporate lobbying firms full of know-how and know-who to make more money for their corporate clients. What do you think can be done here?

Bruce Fein: I'll just add a little footnote to what you said, Ralph. Not only that but the executive branch, especially the Defense Department, detail their employees to spy on what's going on in the offices of the Armed Services Committee, the Appropriations Committee for the Defense Department and so on. And the [congress] members take them saying, *well, we don't have to pay them, because the Department of Defense is paying them*. So the whole thing is infiltrated.

Ralph Nader: The Pentagon has an office in the House and Senate. They actually have an office in the Rayburn Office Building where you see uniformed colonels and majors coming in and out, going to their assignments in specific offices. Doesn't this contradict the separation of powers?

Bruce Fein: It surely does. It is just truly amazing. You walk right down the Rayburn Building and the Longworth Building, this long corridor before you go to the cafeteria, and there on the left, it isn't just one—the Marines, the Navy, the Army, the Coast Guard—they all got offices there. Now, I can guarantee you, I've been at the Pentagon. You think there's any congressional office that's sitting at the Pentagon, spending 1.5 trillion a year? Not present anywhere, but Congress clearly could do that.

There's no doubt that under the Constitution, Congress could designate office space in the executive branch, where members of Congress or their staff have authority to sit and do work as part of their oversight function. They don't do any of that. But the vice-versa happens all of the time. They're right in the office space, the legislative branch. And that's why you will find today it's characteristic that any important legislation is initially drafted not in the Congress, by the executive branch or by lobbyists say, "Okay, here it is. You can work with it." So the Congress changes a few commas and semicolons, but otherwise it's outside parties that do this.

Ralph Nader: How would you turn it around?

Bruce Fein: I've proposed, Ralph, in the booklet that I wrote called *Congressional Surrender*, you need to have a congressional constitutional college or university where you can constantly have courses right up adjacent to the office buildings. You can do it online today. You don't have to be in person. But people who have institutional memory know this is what your rights and

prerogatives are. This is what the Supreme Court said. This is the various ways in which you do things. So you're arming them with knowledge. Okay, now I know how to do X, Y, Z to get this information. And it should be available to both members of Congress and the staff.

Ralph Nader: They've strip-mined the staff, so the committees don't have adequate staff to deal with their tasks. They've cut the Government Accountability Office and the Office of Technology Assessment completely. They've defunded it so there's no advice by technically qualified people about issues like weapon systems, nuclear power, invasions of privacy by surveillance, innovations, et cetera. It is so bad. That's what prompted us to start this *Capitol Hill Citizen*.

A bright spot occurred about two years ago. A young staffer with Congressman Jamie Raskin, Jacob Wilson, organized the Congressional Progressive Staff Association, and he has over 2000 staff in the House and Senate who've become members and they want to try to change the situation. And it's 50-50 that listeners have a senator or representative with the staffer who belongs to the Congressional Progressive Staff Association (CPSA). Look it up and get involved, [cpsaDC.org]. And that's a way you can connect and get beyond the lobbyists and the minders that shield the members of Congress from the people back home.

We're out of time, Bruce, but I do want to point out that in this issue Bruce has his article on Congressional war power. There's also an article by Tom O'Brien on why unions are losing to corporations on Capitol Hill and around the country. There's just a lot of good information to make you a Capitol Hill citizen.

So thank you very much, Bruce, for your work. And obviously, we'll continue with our discussion on Capitol Hill with you on the program in the future.

Bruce Fein: Thank you very much, Ralph.

Steve Skrovan: We've been speaking with Bruce Fein. We will link to his work at ralphnaderradiohour.com.

Up next, we're going to talk about "Why is Louis DeJoy still in charge of the post office?" 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 8, 2023. I'm Russell Mokhiber.

Swiss private bank, Banque Pictet, has admitted to conspiring with U.S. taxpayers and others to hide more than \$5.6 billion in more than 1600 secret bank accounts in Switzerland and elsewhere, and to conceal the income generated in those accounts from the IRS. Banque Pictet entered into a deferred prosecution agreement and will pay \$122 million to the U.S. Department of the Treasury. The resolution is one of a series of cases brought by the U.S. Justice Department in connection with its investigation since 2008 into facilitation of offshore U.S. tax evasion by foreign banks.

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, Ralph, Hannah, and the rest of the team.

Louis DeJoy was a Trump appointee. Joe Biden has had over three years to get rid of him. Why is he still there? David?

David Feldman: Vishal Shankar is a Senior Researcher at the Revolving Door Project, which scrutinizes executive branch appointees to ensure they use their office to serve the broad public interest rather than to entrench corporate power or seek personal advancement. He has also worked at Inequality Media, as well as several government offices, nonprofits, and policy research projects. His work has appeared in *The American Prospect* and *Common Dreams*, and he has been quoted in *The New Republic*, *The Lever*, and the *Capitol Hill Citizen*.

Welcome to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*, Vishal Shankar.

Vishal Shankar: Thank you. It's a pleasure to be here.

Ralph Nader: Welcome indeed, especially because you really zeroed in on the US Postal Service, which is such a great institution historically, to bind the country together, started by Benjamin Franklin way back when. And there's been almost three years of the Biden Administration, and the Trump nominee, Louis DeJoy, is still the postmaster general. How long do people have to wait to stop his destructive impact, which we'll get to, on the Postal Service delivery process and pricing process, before the Democrats replace them? Why haven't they had a majority on the board of governors? Can you bring us up to date here?

Vishal Shankar: Absolutely. That's an excellent question, Ralph, and I can't tell you how many times I've been asked that myself. Whenever I've written about the Postal Service, my emails and my comments are full of a very valid question—Why, since President Biden has been the president for nearly four years, is Trump crony, Louis DeJoy still in office?

And the answer is, unfortunately, very simple, which is that when it comes to the Postal Board of Governors, which is the only entity that can directly fire Louis DeJoy, Biden has unfortunately nominated some DeJoy supporters to this board, the worst of whom is a man named Derek Kan. He's actually a Republican, a former aide to Mitch McConnell, and later to McConnell's wife, Elaine Chao, when she ran the Department of Transportation. And he's enjoyed a very lucrative revolving door career in the private sector. He's been a management consultant for Bain. He's been a senior executive for Lyft, the rideshare company, and advised a real estate company, Toll Brothers, and a predatory private equity firm, Oak Tree Capital.

So the nomination of Derek Kan was really quite puzzling, particularly given the partisan balance requirements of the board, did not require Biden to nominate a Republican. He could have nominated another Democrat or even an independent, but instead he nominated this DeJoy-supporting Republican.

Another troubling Biden nominee to the board is a man named Dan Tangherlini, a Democrat who sort of failed upwards in his career. In the late 2000s, he was embroiled in an ethics scandal

surrounding an education consulting firm that he co-founded, EdBuild. During the Obama years, he ran the General Services Administration, a time at which he was actually protested by federally contracted service workers for failing to combat wage theft. And it was also during this time that Tangherlini, as head of the GSA, leased DC's historic old post office building to none other than Donald Trump, who turned it into the infamous Trump DC Hotel. And just like Trump, and just like Derek Kan, Dan Tangherlini has also dallied in real estate.

He's been a senior executive at Artemis Real Estate Partners, a predatory private equity firm owned by the Pritzker family that has made disturbing investments in residential real estate and in hospitals. And Tangherlini himself has said something that quite deeply alarmed me when he was nominated to the Postal Board, which is that he wanted to, "Explore efficiencies in the Postal Services real estate portfolio." Given this man's background, and really given what postal management has been doing over the last decade—selling off historic postal buildings to real estate investors who buy these properties for pennies on the dollar and flip them for multimillions. This was the background of a man not willing to stand up to Louis DeJoy.

So at this point, Biden has actually nominated five of the nine postal governors, which on paper, should be enough to fire DeJoy. But with those nominations of Tangherlini and Kan, he squandered the golden opportunity to give the board an anti-DeJoy majority.

Ralph Nader: What's his motivation to continue this, other than he's really out of it? Because he kept the head of the IRS appointed by Trump, who before he headed the IRS, was a corporate loophole lawyer making tons of money, and he kept him on for two years into his administration, the Biden Administration. What's going on? Are we dealing with a Trojan horse here? Are we dealing with Biden being Delaware Joe?

Vishal Shankar: That's another great point, Ralph, on Chuck Rettig, the Trump-appointed IRS commissioner. If I had to speculate, because really, Biden hasn't given a proper explanation for why he's dragged his feet on giving the postal board an anti-DeJoy majority, it's that he just simply doesn't view removing Louis DeJoy as a top priority.

A lot of the immediate sabotage attempts that DeJoy made at the agency in his first week—the slowdowns in the mail, the removal of the mailboxes and sorting machines—a lot of those were halted by the courts. So the crisis is not as immediate to Biden, his voters, his supporters. And, in my opinion, they very wrongly believe that they can work with this man who is proven to be untrustworthy, a Republican mega donor and partisan hack, and most importantly, a committed privatizer of the United States Postal Service.

Ralph Nader: Aren't there two more appointees that are coming in this month where he could control the board of governors to fire DeJoy?

Vishal Shankar: Yes, that's actually a very well-timed question. And depending on how you measure it, Biden has actually had this ability since December of last year. December 8, 2022 was when the terms for two Trump-nominated board members, Lee Moak and William Zollars, both of whom were DeJoy supporters, actually expired.

So last December was really the earliest opportunity for Biden to replace these two and make his sixth and seventh nominations to the postal board. For reasons unbeknownst to me, and as of yet unexplained, Biden declined to take up this opportunity, which allowed Moak and Zollars to serve an additional extra year on the board in what are called holdover terms. Those terms actually just expired this week, Friday, December 8, 2023.

So as of this point, those seats are sitting vacant, and it's a golden opportunity for Biden to rectify his past mistakes and nominate two candidates to the postal board who will be committed opponents of Louis DeJoy, stop his destructive agenda, and fire him. I and a lot of postal advocates at the Save the Post Office Coalition-Take on Wall Street have endorsed former Congresswoman Brenda Lawrence and postal policy expert Sarah Anderson to fill these two vital seats.

Ralph Nader: Let's go down to where the postal people are delivering the mail, and the post offices are too strapped to be able to provide the service that the people need. Let's go through five points that you know a lot about.

One is five successive postal rate increases under DeJoy. Explain.

Vishal Shankar: Sure. This is part of DeJoy's delivering for America plan, what he has called his 10-year strategic vision for the Postal Service that he claims will finally rebalance the Postal Service's finances, will bring in the revenue needed to offset expenses and secure its future. Now, that's what he claims.

The reality could not be farther from the truth. Sustained postal rate increases, an authority that DeJoy has tapped into at every opportunity possible, will only drive business away from the Postal Service and into the arms of its competitors. And indeed, you're seeing that it's already starting to do so.

DeJoy had projected under this 10-year plan, which began being rolled out two years ago, that this year would be the year where the Postal Service finally broke even on its finances. Instead, it has reported a \$6.5 billion net loss under this DeJoy stealth privatization scheme, setting aside even the question of whether we should be running public services like this as profit-seeking enterprises.

These sustained postal rate increases are a terrible idea. They're counterproductive to the long-term health of the Postal Service, and really just one of the many damaging aspects in this 10-year plan. It calls for closing a lot of smaller post offices and local sorting facilities in favor of these new regional sorting centers, which will add extra commute time to the daily commutes of postal workers and lead many even to drop out of the postal workforce.

One of the most alarming aspects of this plan, which DeJoy bafflingly has bragged about in public, is that over the next 10 years, he wants to eliminate 50,000 jobs from the agency's payroll—50,000 jobs that have been good union paying jobs, and reliable pathways into the middle class for many American workers, particularly non-white workers, who for far too long were locked out of the American dream. The Postal Service gave them that shot, that opportunity, and Louis DeJoy wants to rip it all away.

Ralph Nader: Well, you've gone into the second one, just from what you just said. The third point is, he has to replace the fleet of postal trucks, because they're old and they're inefficient. He resisted moving into the electric truck arena until there was a lot of criticism, and then he cut a deal with Oshkosh Defense Corporation. Describe that.

Vishal Shankar: You nailed it, Ralph. DeJoy, and especially his PR team, have been trying to convince credulous journalists in the mainstream press, particularly at *Politico* and *Time*, that he has turned over a new leaf, that he has entered a second act, that he's Biden's climate ally on the fleet. And this is so, so far from the truth, which is that at every possible step of the way, Louis DeJoy has opposed further electrification of the postal fleet.

His initial draft plan with Oshkosh Defense only called for 10% of the fleet to be electric. The remaining 90% would have been gas-guzzling trucks that rated at a shocking 8.6 miles per gallon fuel efficiency and would have locked in 20 million metric tons of carbon emissions over the next 20 years. It was only after Louis DeJoy was sued by multiple climate groups and labor unions that feeling that pressure, he slowly upped the purchase quota of electric vehicles, initially to 40%, and now at its current level, 62%, which I should note, still leaves 40% of a potential fleet as gas guzzler combustion engines.

I will note that the Postal Service's own inspector general, in a report last year, found that the Post Office need not stop at 60% electric. In fact, 95% of current Postal Service routes could actually be served by electric vehicles without the need for any major infrastructure changes or investments, and that the long-term cost of a fully electric fleet would actually be cheaper for the Postal Service in the long run than any mix of combustion, gas, and electric.

So that's on the climate aspect of the plan. But the far more alarming part of this contract, which I very rarely see mentioned in the press, disappointingly, is that these vehicles are going to be built 100% with non-union scab labor. This is through a company called Oshkosh Defense, which is actually based here in Wisconsin, in the city of Oshkosh, that has cultivated over the years a well-deserved reputation for high-quality vehicles built by its long-unionized UAW workforce in the city of Oshkosh.

The company had promised, for the months leading up to this contract, that if it were to build the postal delivery vehicles, they would use an existing facility in Wisconsin to make them and use union workers to do so. But as soon as the contract was announced, Oshkosh pulled a bait-and-switch. They said they weren't going to build these trucks in Wisconsin. They were actually going to move production to Spartanburg, South Carolina, one of the most notoriously anti-union and anti-worker states.

And crucially, there, the factories and the facilities weren't even up and running. They had to convert, I believe, a Rite Aid warehouse into a vehicle manufacturing plant. Whereas if they'd built in Wisconsin, not only were the facilities primed and ready to build these trucks, but the workers were eager to be a part of this. They were excited to be a part of the electric vehicle transition and to get these good union jobs.

So I'll quickly shout out UAW Local 578, which is the UAW union up here in Oshkosh, which has been attending every postal board meeting that I can recall of the last two years, urging the board to investigate DeJoy's negotiations with Oshkosh, and whether he knew beforehand that the company was going to pull this bait-and-switch and to call for the contract to be renegotiated so that it is fully union built. And I think that's something that not only the postal board should look into, but Biden, who claims to be the most pro-union president since FDR, should really speak out against this disgusting union busting move by Oshkosh Defense.

Ralph Nader: We exposed Joe Biden, pro-union, in an article in the November/December issue of the *Capitol Hill Citizen*. He can't sustain that in terms of his political career.

DeJoy prides himself on saying he wants to expand the reach of the post office and bring in new revenue. What about beer and wine? Is that still prohibited, or can the Postal Service deliver it? And in what other areas, postal banking, et cetera, is he's pretty sluggish and not furthering?

Vishal Shankar: I'd have to check on the beer and wine thing. I'm not as particularly familiar with that, but I don't believe that's changed.

But on the broader question of expanding services and bringing in revenue, DeJoy has been one of the single biggest impediments to piloting or expanding to creative new ideas that can grow out the Postal Service for decades to come. I'm thinking specifically of financial services like low-fee ATMs or expanded check cashing at post offices that DeJoy has been very reluctant to either invoke existing authority to expand or to work with Congress to expand.

Another proposal, which I know, Ralph, you have been a longtime proponent of, is bringing back postal banking, a system we used to have in this country, for I believe about 50 years, until the banking lobby decided that it was a threat to their profits and lobbied to kill it. This could be a service that would not only bring in much needed revenue to the Postal Service, but also serve unbanked and underbanked communities across the country who have been left behind by Wall Street greed.

And there are many other proposals that postal advocates have laid out as part of a people's postal agenda that DeJoy has simply refused to consider. For example, public Wi-Fi in postal lobbies, which would be a lifeline to communities who have been left behind on the wrong side of the digital divide, public vehicle charging stations for electric vehicles at post offices, and grocery delivery with local grocery stores, particularly for communities where people are elderly or immunocompromised and can't as easily go to the grocery store to get their groceries.

The Postal Service could be providing a very valuable lifeline here, but DeJoy has very stubbornly refused to consider these great potential ideas and is doubling down on service cuts and rate hikes as the only way he thinks he can run the agency.

Ralph Nader: Yeah. You raise the prices, reduce the service, not exactly going to succeed in any enterprise.

Vishal Shankar: Exactly.

Ralph Nader: He sits in his air-conditioned office in downtown Washington, looking out from his broad glass windows during the hottest summer on record in the United States. And how's he treating all these postal workers, sweating it out day after day?

Vishal Shankar: Well, I'll tell you, Ralph. It's absolutely shameful, the blind eye that Louis DeJoy has turned to the postal workforce in these hot summer months. As I noted in the article that I wrote, this heat wave this past summer, a direct result of the climate crisis, was one of the deadliest for the postal workforce.

A postal worker in Dallas, I believe, tragically died while on the job. And many postal workers have raised complaints to the press and to management that there are insufficient protections at the agency to keep workers from collapsing or losing their lives on the job because of extreme heat. But DeJoy, in spite of these complaints—I mean, workers have even mentioned that their managers are telling them to falsify safety documents related to the USPS Health Illness Prevention Program. DeJoy has turned a blind eye to all of this. He has yet to outline any solutions, after multiple members of Congress grilled him on this back in July about improvements that he would make to this illness prevention program to ensure that carriers aren't losing their lives on their routes.

But, he had nothing to say about this at the most recent postal board meetings. Contrast that to Postal Governor Ron Stroman, one of the few DeJoy critics on the postal board, who spoke at length about the toll that this deadly summer heat was taking on postal carriers and urged the agency to adjust its delivery hours or provide cold water bottles to carriers on these long routes. So it really is shameful that Louis DeJoy is doing this. However, it really shouldn't be surprising, considering what we know about the man. If we want a Postal Service that values and protects its carriers and its employees, Louis DeJoy has to go.

Ralph Nader: Congressman Pascrell from New Jersey has said "DeJoy's record is one of corruption and deconstruction." Is he currying favor with the commercial third-class mailers and making the first-class residential users of the Postal Service pay the freight?

Vishal Shankar: Well, it's an interesting question. I'm not really sure who Louis DeJoy's allies are at this point. Probably the biggest industry players and those who are actively seeking to privatize the Postal Service.

You mentioned the corruption that Congressman Pascrell noted. DeJoy has incurred so many ethics scandals over just the three years he's been U.S. Postmaster General that even I've lost count. He's owned stock in XPO Logistics, a contractor that he actually ran before becoming Postmaster General. And just shortly after he joined the agency, he signed a very lucrative contract with the United States Postal Service. He's owned stock in UPS, in Amazon and in Abbott Laboratories, which manufactured the at-home COVID tests that the Postal Service mailed out two years ago.

When we're talking about business, it's crucial to note that the changes DeJoy has implemented—the rate hikes, the extended delivery windows, the overall reduction of reliability in the Postal Service—are a huge detriment, not only for day-to-day customers of the Postal Service or people who rely on timely delivery of the mail, but also to small businesses and to E-commerce sellers

who really rely on the Postal Service having affordable rates and reliable service to keep their livelihoods running.

So long as Louis DeJoy remains in power, his agenda is not only a threat to people who rely on the mail for life-saving medications or for timely delivery of paychecks and bills, but also for these small businesses and E-commerce sellers who need a well-working and affordable Postal Service to run their businesses.

Ralph Nader: Just to conclude, we've been talking with Vishal Shankar, who is a senior researcher with the Revolving Door Project, between business and government, so-called Washington-Wall Street Merry-Go-Round. Thank you, Vishal Shankar, for your interest. And I hope listeners will pick up on some of your insights and recommendations, especially turning that Board of Governors around in the month of December.

Vishal Shankar: Yeah, my pleasure. And do you mind actually, if I just give a few quick plugs for resources that listeners might find useful?

Ralph Nader: Sure.

Vishal Shankar: So if you're interested in learning more about the campaign to save the post office, please check out the excellent work of Steve Hutkins at savethepostoffice.com, who's done a masterful job of tracking every detail of DeJoy's agenda.

Ralph Nader: Yes, indeed. We've had him on the show. He's a one-man show.

Vishal Shankar: Yup. Steve is a machine.

Also check out the Take On Wall Street, Save the Post Office Coalition, and join their mailing list for updates on these board nominations. Amplify the work of UAW Local 578. These are the auto workers in Oshkosh, Wisconsin, who are fighting for a fair, union-made contract for these electric vehicles.

And if you haven't already, please do watch the great documentary, *The Great Postal Heist*, which goes into the long history of the Postal Service and neoliberal attempts to privatize it and which features, as one of the talking heads, Mr. Ralph Nader.

Ralph Nader: Well, it's good to have you on the show, and we hope to continue this effort in future weeks. If you want to read more about the Postal Service, it's in the current issue of the *Capitol Hill Citizen*.

Vishal, why don't you tell our listeners how they can contact the Revolving Door Project that you are a part of?

Vishal Shankar: You can find our work online at therevolvingdoorproject.org. You can also find us on any of the major social media platforms, even if certain tech billionaires would rather that we not be on those platforms. And we have a weekly feature in *The American Prospect* for anyone who reads that magazine.

Ralph Nader: We've been talking with Vishal Shankar, senior researcher with the Revolving Door Project. Thank you very much, Vishal.

Vishal Shankar: Thank you, Ralph. It was a pleasure to be here.

Steve Skrovan: Ralph, not surprisingly, you had an editorial in the *Capitol Hill Citizen*. Tell us what that was all about.

Ralph Nader: Well, it's pretty transformative. It's just two small bills that I propose that could change the way Congress operates tremendously.

One is anytime our government gets into armed conflict or wars overseas, all able-bodied and age-qualified children and grandchildren of all members of Congress are conscripted into the armed forces, either for civilian work or for military work. If that happens, you can be sure they will be very cautious about plunging our sons and daughters and our treasury into these wars of empire all over the world because they'll have skin in the game, which they don't at the present time.

And the second bill is that Congress would be prohibited from giving itself any benefits like health insurance, life insurance, et cetera, that they don't give to the American people, to in effect, level the playing field so that we don't have a plutocratic Congress getting off with all kinds of perks and benefits, while millions of Americans are deprived of health insurance and other benefits.

And I describe those two bills and challenge any member of Congress to introduce them. But if the first member of Congress introduces those two short bills, they're going to generate a huge public discussion in this country coming from conservative and liberal families.

Steve Skrovan: All right. Thank you very much for that, Ralph. For the *Capitol Hill Citizen*, go to capitolhillcitizen.com.

I want to thank our guests again, Marion Nestle, Bruce Fein, and Vishal Shankar.

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". We're going to have a lot of material for you folks, but "The Wrap Up" also features Francesco DeSantis and "In Case You Haven't Heard."

A transcript of this program will appear on the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour* Substack site soon after the episode is posted.

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.

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.