

RALPH NADER RADIO HOUR EP 454 TRANSCRIPT

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

David Feldman: Hello, Steve.

Steve Skrovan: And David, We've moved our presence to Substack. Tell us what that means for the listeners.

David Feldman: You can still subscribe for free and find the podcast archives and transcripts at ralphnaderradiohour.com. To continue the conversation after each show, go to the comments section and post a comment or question on the current week's episode. We'll pick some standout comments, ask Ralph for his response, and post his reply. As we settle into this new platform, we're excited to explore new ways to connect with you.

Steve Skrovan: Thank you for that, David. And now we're going to introduce the man of the hour, Ralph Nader. Hello, Ralph.

Ralph Nader: Hello, everybody. Beware of Medicare Advantage, a snare in the delusion during the enrollment period for Medicare.

Steve Skrovan: Yes, we're going to talk about that later in the show. But first up, as many of you know, Jim Hightower has appeared on this program numerous times, he is witty and insightful, with a deep well of knowledge about the American political system. And today we're going to talk with him about a whole range of topics, including his own experience running for office in Texas, what happened with Beto O'Rourke and the recent governor's race down there, how the Democratic Party seems to be in the thrall of DC political consultants. We're going to talk midterms, grassroots movements, the battle between corporate Dems versus Progressive Dems, and much, much more. We look forward to spending the bulk of the hour with America's Number One Populist, the good kind.

Then at the end, Ralph is going to take a little time to talk more about the corporatization of Medicare. We're in the sign-up period and the nation's airwaves and mailboxes are inundated with pitches for what we call Medicare Disadvantage. Ralph is going to reiterate that it's not what you pay, it's what you get. And if you look into it, you don't get too much. Ralph also has an update on the ongoing Boeing Max 8 crash litigation.

As always, somewhere in the middle, we'll check in with our corporate crime reporter, Russell Mokhiber. But first, let's get the lowdown from Hightower. David?

David Feldman: Jim Hightower is a syndicated columnist, national radio commentator, and America's Number One populist. He is a board member of Public Citizen and a founding member of Our Revolution, an organization inspired by the issues brought up in the Bernie Sanders campaign. He writes a monthly newsletter called *The Hightower Lowdown*.

Welcome back to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*, Jim Hightower.

Jim Hightower: Great to be with you, David and Ralph, and the whole team there, and Naderites wailing across America, daring to tell the truth and confront the powers that be on behalf of the powers that ought to be.

Ralph Nader: And part of the truth is that Jim Hightower was elected twice to be Texas Agricultural Commissioner and was heading for higher office when some dirty tricks were played. I always thought you were heading for the governorship, Jim, and then would have rebuilt the whole Democratic Party in Texas, changed the electoral vote calculus, perhaps on a national level. Can you tell us what happened?

Jim Hightower: Well, money happened. Karl Rove, it was his first dabble in Texas politics. He later went to fame with backing George Bush – George W. Bush – "Shrub," as Molly Ivins called him. He practiced on me running TV ads, for example, showing a flag burner, setting a flag on fire and throwing it down on the ground. And then my picture came up out of the fire, implying that I was the one burning the flag. So that, and I had supported Jesse Jackson for president, and Karl Rove used that in a racist manner throughout the tough areas of East Texas, so that drained some votes away from me as well. And I was at that point leading the ticket, so I couldn't raise any money. Ann Richards was on the ballot at the same time for governor and the money people and the Democratic Party were putting all their coins on her and saying, oh, Hightower, you're going to win, so we're not worried about you. And then sure enough, there was enough of those negative ads that trickled some support that I had had previously away from me. So I got nipped by about one percentage point.

Ralph Nader: What office were you contesting?

Jim Hightower: Well, that was still the Agriculture Commissioner.

Ralph Nader: Was it the third?

Jim Hightower: Yes, yes. And Rick Perry was Karl Rove's candidate. As I later said, he puts the goober in gubernatorial, which he proved to do, but he started out as Agriculture Commissioner. So it was a pretty ugly campaign. But at the same time it unleashed me to go beyond agricultural issues and to take on corporate power generally.

Ralph Nader: What year was that?

Jim Hightower: That was in 1990.

Ralph Nader: 1990. Thirty-two years ago. Do you think you could have been governor if they didn't play dirty tricks on you?

Jim Hightower: Yes, yes. I mean, because when I first ran for office for Agriculture Commissioner, it was a deliberate attempt to show that an economic progressive populist could win. The progressives in the state, the liberals, had become defeatist. We'd lost a couple of statewide elections and they were saying, as the media was pushing the line, that Texas had turned conservative. Well, I knew they were talking about people like my own father, who, if you ask, are you liberal or conservative, he would have said conservative, but he also despised what Walmart was doing to Main Street businesses like his. He despised what the oil companies were doing to the Texas Legislature. He despised corporate power generally.

So if you talked about those kinds of pocketbook issues, then I said people would respond to it. And sure enough, they did. So I ran that kind of a campaign in 1982 with overtly progressive populist issues and putting together a multiracial, multiethnic, multi-dynamic campaign. I was the first statewide candidate to ever speak to a gay organization, for example, and we rallied farmers to join with environmentalists to team up with Black and Mexican American, and even the Asian population that was beginning to grow--Asian Americans particularly down around the Houston area. So we put all that together, and won, and then proceeded to govern on that basis with those same forces in play. And we were able to produce all kinds of big changes in the food and farm economy here in Texas: pesticide regulations, direct marketing by farmers through farmers markets, and co-ops etcetera. So we began to show a new way of organizing politics and the economy. And people responded very favorably to that. And that same sentiment would have carried over into a gubernatorial or a senatorial race.

Ralph Nader: In the intervening years, something drastically wrong happened. The national Democrats started to abandon Texas and they started at the top when they didn't contest seriously the presidential campaigns. And so George Herbert Walker Bush won big in Texas, and George W. Bush won big in Texas with the dirty trick assistance of Karl Rove. And I had a conversation with Ben Barnes, who was a well-known Democratic political observer in Texas. He told me that the Democrats not seriously contesting presidential races in Texas shredded the whole party down to dog catcher--all the way down to the local area. They weakened the party. And of course, the electoral votes every four years went for the Republican nominee. So why didn't Beto O'Rourke pick up from your example, from your analysis when he took on Ted Cruz four years ago and lost narrowly, and took on Governor Abbott just this year and lost less narrowly? He had huge physical stamina. He went in every county in Texas, and he was a whirlwind of activity. But the focus was very heavily on his take on guns, crime, abortion, producing good jobs at a general level of political discussion. What do you think went wrong with that campaign?

Jim Hightower: Well, you got to go back earlier than that and that's back to what you and Ben Barnes were talking about when the Democratic Party didn't just abandon Texas, they abandoned grassroots politics. They went with the money. They said directly, we can raise big money just like Republicans can, and then we can put our ads on television and we will defeat them with TV ads. That was a disaster. More recently, Hillary Clinton's campaign for president in 2016, you had to pay to get a yard sign. You had to pay \$5 to get a yard sign. I mean, that's not a formula for building grassroots support. And they abandoned the grassroots parties, the county parties, and local parties, and the independent progressive organizations out there for moneyed candidates. And when you raise big money from corporate and elite interests, you're going to respond to corporate and elite interests in governance. And so with a corporate agenda the party began to drift away from working class people, dirt farmers, environmentalists, women, children, et cetera,. And so we began to fade. As Harry Truman said, if you give people a choice between Republicans and Republicans, they're going to choose the Republicans. And that's what happened to us; our party essentially quit competing on our strength, which is the grassroots progressive populist issues.

And when Beto O'Rourke first ran against Ted Cruz for the Senate, he came to visit with me, among many, many people, of course, but made clear to me that he wanted to run as a progressive. And I said, well, then you got to be for Medicare for All; you got to take no

corporate money, and you got to fire all your consultants. And he did do those three things. But he didn't strongly run on those populist issues. He still held back some. And as you indicated, he stressed more cultural social issues than the economic populist issues that are the strength of the Democratic Party. And so that's why he went to those 254 counties in Texas; that's not a small chore. He went to the mall and he talked to people and listened to people, but he didn't offer an agenda that was really strong. For example, he could have won farm counties. My last issue of *The Hightower Lowdown* focused on the farm depression, and the power of monopolies and monopsonies (the market condition that exists when there is one buyer) to gouge farmers and then turn and gouge consumers. The same corporations are doing both. Had he campaigned on that alone, which would have added 5%, maybe even 10%, to his total in the number of those counties, and that would have been enough to put him over. You don't have to win the counties, but you've got to do better than 30%. Thirty-five would be good, 40, it would be excellent. And then you begin to win statewide races.

The map of Texas in this last election was really remarkable. So here it is, and it has blue dots in Dallas, Austin, San Antonio, Houston, El Paso, and then in the Rio Grande Valley, and the rest of those 254 counties are red. You can't have a map like this and win a statewide election. And back to my races, I won counties that were red at the time by talking about these populist issues. And so that's what we have to get back to. That has to be the total emphasis of the race. We saw it happen with John Fetterman in Pennsylvania. He went to all the counties in Pennsylvania, but he went with a message that ordinary people, including the white working class population, could vote for, and found themselves, heard themselves in that message. And that's what Democrats have to get back to being working class focused, but with totally biracial, multiracial emphasis, because the same thing is... I saw a startling figure here just living like the last 10 years, the Black working class support for Democrats has fallen by about 15%, because they're not hearing the message. The message is the same when you deal with the economic issues, because all people care about, basically the same thing. And if you look at what Fetterman said after he won his race, it was a powerful statement for the whole populist agenda in which he basically said we supported Medicare for All, we supported good jobs and good wages, what's called family-sustaining jobs; that's a good phrase. He supported unions, very strong union support, unabashed about it. He went hard at the populist issues, and those people responded to it. So we can do it again. We just have to keep rebuilding. Every now and then we reach a peak, as we did, for example, in 1982 when I won, because at the same time Attorney General Jim Mattox won that office Ann Richards won the treasurer's office. Garry Mauro won the land commissioner's office, and I was Ag commissioner. So we had a unified ticket working together. And that made people think, it's not just electing one good person; we could almost elect a government here so things could actually change.

Ralph Nader: And I might add, about that time, two other things were countering your progress. Number one was Tony Coelho, who was in charge of raising money in the House of Representatives,--he's from California--persuaded the Democrats that they could raise a lot of money from corporate PACs just like the Republicans. And we saw it in Washington with fewer congressional hearings, fewer regulatory agency actions, and fewer oversight investigations they started losing their base in the Congress. And the other thing that happened was what Ben Barnes alluded to. They abandoned huge territory and didn't compete--the mountain states, the southern states. And I was just looking at the situation in Wyoming where there really is no Democratic Party. Although Wyoming has over 30 counties only two of them even have a local Democratic

Party committee. And so the wins by the Republicans in Wyoming are around 70%; 30% of the people vote Democratic without any Democratic activity to speak of other than nominal opponents to the dominant Republicans.

And Wyoming used to be a populist state. North and South Dakota used to have Democratic senators--Abourezk, McGovern, Conrad, others. The same is true for Idaho, which had Frank Church. They had a Democratic senator from Utah. And now it's just about all Republican except Bennet in Colorado, and the Democratic Party has abandoned it. So how do they expect to win the Congress or win the Senate when they start out with a handicap of 10 to 12 seats from these states that they don't spend as much money on as they spend on one race in New Jersey?

Jim Hightower: Well, it's the old saying, "if ignorance is bliss, they must be ecstatic" because they're completely ignorant about rural areas, red areas. They say, "Well, that's a red area, so we're not going to spend any time there." Well, in that red area there are, as you indicated, even 30% of the vote with no infrastructure support from the national or state Democratic Party. But you could get that up to 50%. You could get it to 60% if you ran a real populist campaign that clearly said, we are on your side. And that means we're going to go against the people who are running over you, not just we're going to be for you; we're going to be against those who are stomping on you. Then people respond to that. But if you don't show up, you're not going to win. And we're not going to win just by going to cities and the inner suburbs. Yes, we have to be strongly active there. Yes, we have to be totally committed to women's right to control their own bodies. All of that is a given. But you've got to have something in addition to that. And that's all I'm saying is it's going to be a program that is multiracial, multiethnic, that is diverse. That's not a bad word. You can use that in a winning manner, as John Fetterman did, and yet reach out to those red areas as well without compromising any of your values, in fact, by extending your values to a broader group of people.

Ralph Nader: The minimum wage is a big issue in Texas. There's huge numbers of low-income workers. What's the actual state minimum wage?

Jim Hightower: \$7.25, yeah so it's the national minimum wage.

Ralph Nader: So in Arkansas, they had a referendum. They raised the minimum wage, conservative Arkansas. Conservative Florida had referendums against big money opposing it to raise the minimum wage and the minimum wage increased. They just don't seem to get the message. And they're at it again. They figured out that Florida was lost, so they pulled the money away from Crist and Deming. They figured out Ohio was lost, so they pulled the money away from Tim Ryan. A very small number of people in Washington make these decisions and you can never get them on the phone. So, here's the take after November 8th from my view, Jim; maybe you'll agree with this. If there were no polls whatsoever for the November 8th election, would the Democrats credibly be able to be so enthusiastic and indicate that they really won in Washington? Because ~~with the polls,~~ they said, the polls were wrong. They thought we were going to be landslided in the House of Representatives and lose the Senate. We just held on to the Senate and we barely lost the House. Well, you lost the House. A loss is a loss against the most corrupt, violence-prone, election denier--Wall Street over Main Street, anti-worker, anti-women, anti-children, GOP party in its history. And so this is what they do but they don't look in the mirror

and say what do we have to do differently? People like Jim Hightower are telling us how we can landslide these Republicans with a broad gauge agenda. But it's amazing, they're delusion. Fortunately, they didn't have anybody to scapegoat this time. They couldn't scapegoat the Greens. But for them to say, look, we almost held on to the House of Representatives against the pundits. Well, put aside the pundits. You should have landslided Kevin McCarthy's crew. What's your take?

Jim Hightower: Absolutely. We lost five seats in New York State, as blue a state as there is, because of exactly what you're describing there. This guy who headed the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, which is the fundraising arm for Democratic Congressional candidates from New York State, first wasted a bunch of money by running against progressives in the Democratic primary early this year, trying to defeat progressives. And then we're left with these corporate candidates, including him, who couldn't win. He lost his own race. So there's five seats right there that we should not have lost in New York State.

Ralph Nader: That would have led to the Democrats retaining control over the House of Representatives because they would've won those five seats. It was a redistricting bungle of historic proportions that listeners should know. This is a heavily Democratic state. It's almost two to one in terms of registration. And the Democratic legislature in Albany passed a radical redistricting. It was so radical it offended the Court of Appeals in New York. Seven judges, all of them appointed by former Governor Cuomo, Democrat, voted four to three to say it was unconstitutional. And they ended up with a master being appointed who redrew the maps. And instead of the Democrats winning five net more seats, they lost four or five net seats, one of them still being counted.

And you don't see that kind of vigor in Texas. I mean, the Republicans challenged Governor Hochul with Lee Zeldin, an election denier, Trumpster member of the House of Representatives, and he came close. But the Democrats, just write off Alabama and Mississippi. Luckily, there's some local effort in Georgia turned it into a purple state. But they're letting Florida become a red state now. Looking forward, it does not look good for the Democrats in the Senate, because nobody's talking about this. But in 2024, there are 23 Democratic or Democratic-leaning independents up for election. So there are 21 Democratic senators up for reelection and two independents--Bernie Sanders and Angus King that vote Democratic.

On the other side, there are only ten Republican senators up for reelection, and they're all in very red states like Wyoming and Indiana. It doesn't look good for them if they continue trying to be crypto-Republicans or trading off campaign money to suppress the kind of policies Franklin Delano Roosevelt espoused on behalf of working people. Do you see a change coming? Do you see any of these apparatchiks resigning? How many times do they have to lose, including their consultants who keep getting rehired no matter how many races they could have won handily or just barely won, setting up another cliffhanger in the next election round. What do you see? Do you see any turbulence here, or just hey, look how good we did; we didn't lose by as much as the pundits told us we were going to lose with the red wave.

Jim Hightower: Well, the DC Democrats are a problem. Everything you just went through is a result of DC Democrats, which essentially are the monied donors to the Democratic Party. They control that. They control the party. The good news is that that's not the party at the grassroots level. The party is changing in a hurry, primarily because of groups like Our Revolution, like Working Families Party, like the environmental groups that are out there organizing, not just the national organizations like Sierra Club, but the local environmental justice movements, for example, are just going so strong and winning against major corporate power and big money. And that's where the change is going to come. We elected seven new members of what's called "the squad" negatively by the monied interests. And those are the overt progressives within the Congress, within the House of Representatives. There already were, I think up to a dozen or so members there. Seven new ones elected, two from Texas, by the way – Greg Casar from the San Antonio-Austin area and Jasmine Crockett from the Dallas-Fort Worth area--overt progressives that are not just going to be two more votes for the Democrats, they're going to be leaders within the caucus pushing for a progressive agenda. You just went through two or three things there, the minimum wage and the Medicaid expansion. People are voting for those things through the initiative process all across America in this very election. And in states like Nebraska that passed the \$15 an hour minimum wage indexed to inflation for the future. States like South Dakota that passed Medicaid expansion against the wishes of the governor and the corporate establishment and the legislature up there. In fact, they tried to basically outlaw the initiative process in South Dakota, but the people rose up against it and defeated that and then passed Medicaid expansion by, like, 2/3 of the people voting for it. So the people are beginning to speak for themselves. Another big change is within the party itself--state parties. I was just in West Virginia, where Joe Manchin has essentially been an individual dictator who has totally controlled the Democratic Party there for years. You can't run as a Democrat without his blessing in that state. But there's this woman who was a social organizer and began to notice that the party was violating all kinds of its own rules about diversity and votes rather than backroom deals, et cetera. And she began to study the rules. She began to organize this six years ago. And in June of this year at the state Democratic Party, she and her group, primarily coming out of the Bernie Sanders campaign in that state, took over the Democratic Party and threw all of Joe Manchin's people out.

The Democratic Party chair in West Virginia is a musician who is a cab driver. The vice chair is a Black woman, the first Black person to ever serve on the state Democratic Executive Committee in West Virginia. Imagine that. I mean, this (year) is probably 20-what? And we're just now getting to that. These are feisty people. They did it without money. They did it against the wishes of the National Democratic Party that came in and campaigned against them. But Larry Cohen with Our Revolution and some other good folks helped them from outside. But they built the organization themselves, and they have taken over the Democratic Party. And now they're running candidates that are regular people candidates, not handpicked "Manchinettes" but regular people just running, and they're focusing first on county offices, local offices, and state legislative seats. They're not going for the big thing to just to start with. They're building, and it's a building process. That's what democracy is. And this is the kind of change that's going to happen.

We have a good example here, Ralph, in Texas. A new group called Ground Game Texas has come into being in the last year or so. Mike Siegel and Julie Oliver, two former candidates for Congress, did not win but ran well. They're organizers at heart. And they put this organization together and targeted five cities, not the big cities. They targeted Denton, Texas. They targeted Killeen, Texas. They targeted Bell County--these smaller mid-size cities. We don't have statewide initiatives here in Texas, but we have the home rule initiative (upwards of 350 Texas cities have home rule). So in these cities the people can put an initiative on the ballot. And they put marijuana decriminalization on the ballot in those five cities, and they won every one of the cities. The lowest vote was 60%, the highest was 80% in those cities.

Ralph Nader: Well, we had a Texan on our program a couple of years ago, and he's leading the movement all over the country to get people to recognize they do have the in many places around the country, locally and state, and they ought to use it--direct democracy. (referendum power exists in 23 states and one territory, the U.S. Virgin Islands) You don't have to ask permission of the politicians in the state legislature and city hall, making your points, Jim. We're talking with Jim Hightower, Progressive Populist, agitator, editor of *The Hightower Lowdown*, which is a great monthly newspaper that really summarizes things for you on one theme after another.. How about the third Congressional District in Washington State, a Republican leaning District where a Trumpster beat the Republican in the primary. Joe Kent, a Fox News regular, and an election denier, was on the ballot, and out of nowhere comes Gluesenkamp Perez, mother of a little boy and co-owner with her husband of an auto repair shop. They built their own house on a hilltop because they couldn't afford a mortgage. And she goes all over the district talking exactly the kind of issues you talk. And she also flipped the word "freedom" against Joe Kent, like freedom of reproductive rights, the freedom to have a decent livelihood with a minimum wage. And she beat him. Before she started getting underway, no one gave her a chance. And just before the election, this group called FiveThirtyEight--I guess they're a polling group--their final forecast was to give her a 2% chance of winning, and she won so she's on her way to Washington. There's a perfect example.

Jim Hightower: Absolutely. And the dirty little secret of polling is that people don't answer their phone anymore. They don't have a home line for the most part, particularly young people. So the pollster badly miscalculated young people that went heavily for Democratic congressional candidates in this election. So the polling is essentially hokey, and we really don't need it at all. Campaigns might need it to kind of get a sense of where they are, but we, the public, don't need a poll. We need information about the candidates, information about the issues, information about the election organizations and ground game that is out there. That gives you useful information of where an election might be headed. And if you had that kind of focus rather than pollsters, they would have seen early on that she was going to do a little better than 2%.

Ralph Nader: For sure. Before we get to Donald Trump's announcement, here's another major area that the Democratic Party has its head in the sand: the Electoral College. They've only lost two presidential campaigns in the last 22 years. In 2000, where they won the popular vote with Al Gore and lost the Electoral College. In 2016, where Hillary Clinton won about three million more votes than Donald Trump; he won the Electoral College. To see the map of progress for the national popular vote and key it into where you're located, you can go to

nationalpopularvote.com. There's very good material on how you can get engaged so that the national popular vote selects our president, not the Electoral College. There's the National Popular Vote Interstate Compact (NPVIC), citizen based movement for a number of years, and they've gotten enough state legislatures and governors to sign off on a law that said that they would give the Electoral College vote to any presidential candidate who won the national popular vote, essentially neutralizing the Electoral College collar, so we'll call it that.

And still, year after year, Democratic Party are not supporting Steve Silberstein, an entrepreneur who started this movement, and he's a big Democrat and he contributes to campaigns, year after year, and they don't make it into an electoral issue. They don't talk about it. What is your take on this?

Jim Hightower: Well, that's another reason that they're losing. And it's another example of the National Democratic Party's control by monied interests that profit from Electoral College decisions because it keeps them in power, literally in power, and the control by the consultants. Shakespeare said "First, kill all the lawyers," but I think first, kill all the consultants, because they're just-- here in Texas, we had until recently our statewide list of supporters of people who voted Democrat, and that would be controlled by the consultants. So every two years we had to pay the consultants to get our list back.

Ralph Nader: What a story. I think the national press should do a post-election expose on these consultants. First of all, most of them have corporate clients during the year, so they're conflicted. Second, they want that 15% of the TV ad buy, as I've said many times, and so they're not interested in the ground game. They wouldn't know a ground game from an air game. And so they sabotaged the Democratic Party again and again. And by the way, there's a sort of a merry go round going here that a lot of former aides to Clinton and Obama end up as consultants.

And there was a story recently showing how egregiously out of control they are; two of these consulting firms tried to sabotage the election campaign of Summer Lee, a 32-year-old Pittsburgh African American. She beat them even though they enlisted an AIPAC PAC to put one to two million dollars just before the election in TV ad buys against Summer Lee, she is now going to be a member of Congress, and she is a huge field organizer like you've never seen.

Jim Hightower: She's one of the seven, Ralph, who are just coming into the Congress. Those seven are going to make a huge difference within the Democratic caucus, in addition to representing their district in a very progressive way.

Ralph Nader: Well, let's hope they make a bigger difference than the original squad, which never connected with the national progressive citizen groups for support for what they were doing, were isolated by the Democratic leaders and became more introverted by the year. Let's talk about Trump. He announced his campaign for 2024, and we were talking before the show that almost all the national media really didn't cover him, except MSNBC and CNN at the early part of the speech. And then they replaced the rest of the speech with commentary pointing out some of his trademark lies.

You're a First Amendment person and there's no responsibility for the media to cover a politician who has a high frequency lie intensity index. But he is a major figure whether we like it or not. Do you have any qualms about the way they blacked him out, the ABC, NBC, CBS, NPR, PBS and others?

Jim Hightower: They're not going to black him out. Okay, so his pokey show didn't air on all the channels, but it aired on plenty. It's in all the newspapers this morning. From the start, from when he came down that escalator at Trump Tower in New York City in whatever that would have been, 2014, '16?

Ralph Nader: '15.

Jim Hightower: Yeah, when he first started. They were gaga over him. They gave him mass coverage when he was nothing. And to some degree, they created him by giving him that coverage. Contrast that with Bernie Sanders when he announced for president and he announced to the snickers of the media establishment. They all just literally laughed. And in fact, Bernie said I would be a little careful if I were you about misestimating me, as George Bush would've put it. Because he knew he had a message that people were going to respond to, and they did. I certainly do not feel badly for Donald Trump having any sort of shortage of media fawning over him. He will continue to get that, including from some of the conservative media that now have heroically begun to back away from him a little bit, but they'll come right back and cover him.

Ralph Nader: What about the law enforcement process? Cautious Attorney General Merrick Garland, the prosecutors in New York and Georgia? It's taking them a long, long time to decide whether they're going to ask a grand jury to indict Donald J. Trump. Do you have any thoughts on all this? Do you think Merrick Garland is taking too long?

Jim Hightower: Yes. They're too meek. Republican attorneys general, Republican congressional leaders, et cetera, when they're in charge, use power. And they use it to change the structure of the system. That's what the Supreme Court is all about--Mitch McConnell and people before him. But Mitch McConnell and the right-wing Koch brothers-supported groups conspired to put a six-person right-wing partisan majority on the Supreme Court that is now overturning common sense, much less the law. So they use power and we tend to fumble around with it and say, well, we've got to be cautious. We don't want to offend anybody. We need to pursue the law carefully that's why we have to have the grassroots movements that build power at a local level. And that's what I see happening, Ralph, all across the country. Again, these groups like the economic justice groups down in South Texas, along the Gulf Coast, also over in Louisiana where this Black led movement in St. John's Parish is taking on the Taiwan Plastics Corporation, Formosa Plastics, a huge multibillion dollar largest corporation in Taiwan. And they're winning. That's what matters. And then people like Summer Lee, people like Keith Ellison in Minnesota who just won the attorney generalship reelection there with millions of dollars put up against him by the corporate powers to try to take him out. People like Lina Hidalgo down in Houston, Texas. She is the county judge there, the highest elected official in Harris County in Houston, Texas. And they put millions of dollars up against her. They being right-wing oil interests and developers to try to take her out. But she won because she's got a real

base. And she has a real base because she does real things that benefit people. So that's the kind of thing that we have to put our faith in, and in that initiative process that you're talking about.

We the progressive movement have been winning initiative fights all across this country for more than a decade now, and yet the Democratic Party pays no attention to it or even goes against it. But it doesn't matter what the National Democratic Party says about a local initiative. You're in control when you put that on the ballot, and grassroots politics then matters, going door-to-door, and that sort of thing. So that's where I get my optimism, Ralph--not paying that much attention what the Washington establishment is doing, but focusing on what the grassroots people are doing, and that's a much more positive and encouraging message.

Ralph Nader: Well, we've been talking with Jim Hightower, among many other achievements, the author of the most successful progressive newsletter probably in the country, *The Hightower Lowdown*. He writes it himself every month. And I tried to convince him to put some of these newsletters in a book, the collected series of Hightower's publication, because they provide real educational information. They can be used in the schools and among civic groups; they can be sent to state, federal and local lawmakers. Anyway, Jim, before we let Steve and David have their say, what's the best way people can reach you?

Jim Hightower: jimhightower.com. That's it.

Ralph Nader: That's easy enough. jimhightower.com. Steve?

Steve Skrovan: Yeah, Jim, I want to circle back to Texas for a moment and back even earlier than November to the primaries where I was getting a lot of contact from a candidate named Jessica Cisneros, who was going against an establishment Democrat named Henry Cuellar. Can you tell us what happened there and how that is sort of indicative of the corporate Dem versus the progressive Dem?

Jim Hightower: Yes, she is very progressive and aggressive, very smart, a tremendous candidate. But the Democratic Party, Henry Cuellar, on the other hand, is an, I don't know, I mean barely a Democrat. He says he's a Democrat. But he votes consistently with Republican interests. So he's supported by the monied establishment down there, and then he turns out to be supported by the political National Democratic Party as well. So just before the primary election, Nancy Pelosi makes a trip to that district down on the Rio Grande Valley to endorse and deliver money to Henry Cuellar against this very progressive Democratic woman who Pelosi should have been supporting. So there we have it.

We just had another race--by the way, the good news is the Republicans had been saying, well we're, about to take over the Rio Grande Valley. We're winning all these Hispanic votes, and then made a big national show about it. The media picked up on it, said, oh, yeah, boy it's changing. Americans turning red. But in this last election, in fact, all of that remained blue. A Republican woman was elected to Congress from a district along the Rio Grande Valley. But she lost the Hispanic vote badly by 17 points. Where she won was in the rural Anglo counties that they that brought in as a gerrymandering process to make that district Republican.

So the good news is that we still have our strength, but we've got to continue to organize it and to take on the Henry Cuellars. Yes, he needs to be outed because he's not standing up for the people the Democrats supposedly represent.

Ralph Nader: She's all of 28 years old. Is she going to try again?

Jim Hightower: Oh, I'm sure.

Steve Skrovan: And Jim, what do you think the Pelosi stated motive was there that Jessica Cisneros could not win? Or is it more ideological, i.e., we just need this corporate Dem in there?

Jim Hightower: Yeah, it's ideological, but it's also just congressional politics, as she put it directly. She said, "I support all the incumbents because they support me. They put me in power." And, Pelosi is so good on so many issues, but she is also very corporate and certainly doesn't want an aggressively progressive National Democratic party. So she's part of the problem basically. But it's in her interest to actually fly down and attend a fundraiser for Henry Cuellar.

Ralph Nader: David?

David Feldman: Jim, it's a privilege to talk with you. We're on the radio and you're a radio guy from Texas. So was John Henry Faulk. I wonder if you could talk a little bit about John Henry Faulk and the power of radio. John Henry Faulk in many ways single handedly destroyed the blacklisting of communists. We have a lot of young people right now who are listening to this show on the radio. Why is it important for Americans to know who John Henry Faulk is and was he, as President Kennedy would say, a profile in courage?

Jim Hightower: It's important that we know our history, our progressive history, which most textbooks don't address and most school curriculums don't address. But we have a dynamic progressive history in this country from the very founding forward, actually before that, and all the way through the populist movement, through the suffrage movement, through the anti-slavery movement, the labor movement and now into environmentalism and women and so many others.

Ralph Nader: Consumer. Don't forget the consumer movement.

Jim Hightower: I'm talking to Mr. Consumer right here with Ralph Nader. But that is a rich history. John Henry Faulk was a national television personality in the 1950s. He was raised here in Texas, just about a mile from where I'm sitting right now, and he was an aggressive civil libertarian. And he talked about these kinds of issues on his national television show, so much so that he got branded a communist by the McCarthyite movement of that period, and they effectively got him banned from television, not just taking his show away, but he could not be on television. So he was certainly a profile in courage there. And he used his television popularity to take on the McCarthyites to challenge their degradation and their destruction of a lot of lives of people, some literally by their loose branding of the communist label.

Woody Guthrie once said I'm not a communist, but I had been in the red all my life. So that is the kind of guy that John Henry Faulk was. He was a Woody Guthrie of the airwaves. And yes, he

then had radio shows. He even ran for Congress at one point. He had supported me in my election period, and I certainly supported him. He had great support from people like Molly Ivins and Ann Richards and others here in Texas, but nationally as well, he stood and made many speeches with the ACLU and other civil libertarian groups.

Ralph Nader: That's a very comprehensive answer to your question, David. How do people get *The Hightower Lowdown*? It's a bargain. Why don't you tell us?

Jim Hightower: Well, you can get it for a \$10 initial offer at hightowerlowdown.org. And there it is. So 10 bucks. Give me 10 bucks and I'll send you 12 issues of the lowdown.

Ralph Nader: What a bargain. You'll Steve Early: what I mean. It's four pages. You can read it when you're on a train or a bus or at home. And by the time you finish, you say, I'm really on top of this subject. I can make my ends meet better when I shop around for insurance or other things that are needed.

Jim Hightower: The best thing that we do in it, Ralph, is we have a do something box in every issue that gives people connections to groups and organizing efforts around the topic that we're addressing at that time. So you don't have to just get pissed off about whatever we're talking about. You can actually do something about it.

Ralph Nader: Thank you very much, Jim, for your lifetime of work and may the past be the least of the future. Thank you.

Jim Hightower: Thank you.

Steve Skrovan: We've been speaking with Jim Hightower. We will link to his work at ralphnaderradiohour.com. Up next, Ralph will give us an update on the number of ongoing issues in the news. But first, let's check in with our corporate crime reporter. You know who he is, Russell Mokhiber.

Russell Mokhiber: From the National Press Building in Washington, D.C., this is your *Corporate Crime Reporter* "Morning Minute" for Friday, November 18, 2022. I'm Russell Mokhiber.

A food poisoning outbreak tied to deli meat and cheese has sickened 16 people, including one who died. That's according to a report from the Associated Press. Most were hospitalized and one illness resulted in the loss of a pregnancy, according to the Centers for Disease Control. The illnesses date back to April last year with the most recent report on Sept. 29.

Many reported eating meat or cheese from deli counters where investigators detected listeria in open packages of sliced meats and in the environment. Those sickened were from New York, Maryland, Massachusetts, Illinois, New Jersey and California. The death was reported in Maryland.

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. Ralph You wanted to talk further about one of our favorite topics, Medicare Advantage, which we call Medicare [Dis]Advantage. What's new on that front?

Ralph Nader: The massive deceptive advertising campaign during the enrollment period for Medicare going out to elderly people. It's so aggressive they're sending these cards and these letters to people who passed away years ago. And they meaning companies like Aetna, Cigna, UnitedHealthcare, and nobody is rebutting it at the Federal Trade Commission. They're not rebutting it out of Congress. They're not holding congressional hearings. AARP is connected with some of these Medicare Disadvantage companies and is getting economic compensation using their trademarks and commissions business with the UnitedHealthcare. So here's an example. In the mail came a double postcard and it said "postage paid, business reply" to something called the National Response Center from Salt Lake City. So you open it up and it says, "Attention Medicare beneficiary. It's time to review your Medicare benefits for 2023. Medicare benefit carriers have finalized the benefit enhancements for year 2023 enrollment period," which by the way ends December 5th, "please tell us what benefits are most important to you for January 2023." And then they poll you and it just so happens that they polled you only the question that Medicare Advantage touts that is dental care, hearing exam, vision exam, and you're supposed to check it off. And then what you will do is if you send them the poll, then they'll really do the hard sell on you.

They've already induced 48% of all Medicare elderly beneficiaries to go into the Medicare Advantage or what I call the Medicare Disadvantage. The traditional Medicare beneficiaries are subsidizing these health insurance companies who are running Medicare Advantage or Medicare Disadvantage. And what they're not telling you in this poll, they don't say do you favor being put in a narrow network? You lose your free choice of doctor and hospital under Medicare Disadvantage. They don't ask you whether you favor prior authorization of your doctors who want to treat you in a certain way, and they got to wait for days sometimes for prior authorization by the insurance company to okay it. They don't tell you that there's a much higher rate of denial of claims than in traditional Medicare and about the many other dark sides to Medicare Disadvantage.

So listeners, spread the word. If you're going to choose, choose traditional Medicare. As Dr. Fred Hyde once said, "It isn't what you pay, it's what you get." And the tragedy isn't no Democratic controlled hearing in the Senate or in the House is really investigating this. There was a letter from some progressive Democrats, the Department of Health and Human Services, which is actually aiding and abetting Medicare (Dis)Advantage, protesting a bit and nothing happened from that letter from the Progressive members of Congress. And of course, AARP, with its many, many local chapters, is saying to the elderly, well, you know, we're not taking sides. Just choose. You can choose. Yeah, you can choose, but the only barrage you're getting is a deceptive barrage in many forms in the mail, on television, and radio, by the health insurance companies who are corporatizing Medicare. And they're going to cross the 50% threshold within a year. The hard sell this year has been unparalleled.

So I think that listeners here, if they're incensed as I am about this, and they're doing the same in corporatizing Medicaid as well in a different way, just call up, never mind write. Call up your member of Congress and talk to anyone, even an intern, and say, "When are the Democrats going to hold investigative hearings on Medicare Disadvantage before we lose Medicare completely?" The name is appropriated; they even seized the name Medicare. DisAdvantage is run by Aetna, UnitedHealthcare, Cigna and other corporate insurance companies.

Steve Skrovan: Ralph, I'm going to pose a question to you from a listener. This is off of the show that we did with Kip Sullivan. A listener, Evan Levine, said, "Great show about Medicare Advantage programs, but you didn't answer the 20% question. If you have Medicare and cannot afford the 20% or supplemental, then what? Medicare should provide a low-cost supplemental or go to copay model at \$50 a visit, et cetera. Overuse can be cured by online requests for tests using algorithms and AI (artificial intelligence) and having strict penalties for cheaters." But I guess the crux of the question is if you have Medicare and can't afford the 20% of supplemental, then what?

Ralph Nader: Well, obviously the basic answer is what she alluded to, which is universal health insurance, single payer. But if you add it all up, again, it isn't what you pay, it's what you get. If you get the supplemental, you get much more coverage quicker where you have to hassle the insurance company under Medicare DisAdvantage and often lose out completely. The other point, which the listener stimulates in terms of a response, is that the Medicare Advantage companies say, well, you can always go back to traditional Medicare if you don't like us. Well, that was true years ago. But now they have all kinds of burdens, pre-existing condition with the supplemental obstacle, and now it's very hard to come back when you realize you've been deceived and you want to go back to traditional Medicare.

So again, it's not what you pay, it's what you get, if you want to make that kind of comparison. When you're seriously ill, you're much better off with Medicare plus the supplemental than under Medicare Advantage so-called. But you'd really be much better off under single-payer, Canadian style. Everybody in, nobody out, a much more efficient, economic system of healthcare that covers you from cradle to the end of life.

Steve Skrovan: So Ralph, you have an update on the situation with Boeing. What's going on there?

Ralph Nader: Well, this is the ongoing litigation by the families regarding the two Boeing 737 Max 8 crashes in Indonesia and Ethiopia. And the judge, a conservative judge in Fort Worth, Federal District Judge, ruled that the Justice Department in settling their criminal case against Boeing, which is a sweetheart settlement with a deferred prosecution agreement, violated the Victims Representation Act, which required the Justice Department to let the families of the victims participate in the process. They froze them out and the judge said that was illegal. And he gave Boeing and Justice Department and the families' attorneys a couple weeks to come up with proposed remedies. Well, the Boeing lawyers of Kirkland & Ellis, a corporate firm in Chicago, told the judge there were no remedies under federal law. The Justice Department came in and told the judge there were no remedies under federal law. So that the Biden Justice

Department is behaving exactly the same concessionary way that the Trump Justice Department behaved that cut this sweetheart deferred prosecution deal with Boeing.

The families, on the other hand, have come in and said there are remedies. You can basically rollback the sweetheart deal, and tell the Justice Department they have to start all over with their case against Boeing. And all this will be decided in the next few weeks by the federal judge, who is a conservative judge, but he saw the gross inequity and the criminal behavior of the Boeing Corporation, and that resulted in the kind of decisions he's making. So stay tuned. It'll keep on. The families are looking for the prosecution of the Boeing Corporation and two top executives, Mr. Muilenburg, who was the CEO at the time, and Mr. Calhoun, who was head of the Boeing Board of Directors at the time, and he is now CEO of Boeing.

The only coverage I've seen on this, Steve, is not by the reporters who've covered this over the years fairly well, but by the *Corporate Crime Reporter*, Russell Mokhiber. So you go to corporatecrimereporter.org and you'll see his description of what's happening in this case out of Fort Worth, Texas.

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

David Feldman: Join us next week on the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour* when our special guest will be Medea Benjamin from CODEPINK. Thank you, Ralph.

Ralph Nader: Thank you everybody.