

## Ralph Nader Radio Hour

### Episode 523

“America, Stop Trying To Make Nuclear Power Happen. It’s Not Going to Happen”

March 16<sup>th</sup>, 2024

**Steve Skrovan:** Welcome to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*. My name is Steve Skrovan. David Feldman is out today, but it wouldn't be a show without a Feldman. So we have Hannah Feldman. Welcome, Hannah.

**Hannah Feldman:** Welcome to you, Steve.

**Steve Skrovan:** And Hannah, you've got something that in a couple of weeks, you want to plug here for us. What are we doing on March 27<sup>th</sup>?

**Hannah Feldman:** That's right. On Wednesday, March 27<sup>th</sup> at 2:00 Eastern, that's PM, we're partnering again with the American Museum of Tort Law to bring you another live virtual taping of the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*. Ralph is going to speak with the father of bad-faith insurance law, Bill Shernoff, about predatory insurance practices and how consumers can protect themselves. Go to [ralphnaderradiohour.com](http://ralphnaderradiohour.com) to sign up and you can join our live Zoom audience.

**Steve Skrovan:** The live Zoom events are always fun, and it is an opportunity for our audience to interact with the team and especially Ralph, the man of the hour, Ralph Nader. Welcome, Ralph.

**Ralph Nader:** Welcome, indeed. And to hear Bill Shernoff, who started the whole litigation against bad-faith insurance, talk, will be a real treat. He'll talk about specific cases and where the situation is at the present time.

**Steve Skrovan:** As for today's show, there are three things that refuse to die: vampires, zombies, and our old friend, nuclear power. The only difference between the undead and nuclear power is that vampires and zombies have never gotten billions of taxpayer dollars to help raise them from the dead. Earlier this month, the House overwhelmingly passed bipartisan legislation to develop a new crop of nuclear power plants. The bill calls for the Nuclear Regulatory Commission [NRC] to loosen its regulations for approving new reactor designs, swapping reactor safety for regulatory speed.

Our guest today will be Tim Judson, the Executive Director of the Nuclear Information Resource Service [NIRS]. Mr. Judson will give us his analysis of this latest nuclear resurrection. As always, somewhere along the line, we'll check in with our relentless corporate crime reporter, Russell Mokhiber. But first, the only thing with a longer half-life than enriched uranium is myopic political support for an industry that has never proven itself to be viable. Hannah?

**Hannah Feldman:** Tim Judson is Executive Director of the Nuclear Information and Resource Service, also known as NIRS. Mr. Judson leads NIRS work on nuclear reactor and climate change issues and has written a series of reports on nuclear bailouts and sustainable energy. He is Chair of the Board of Citizens Awareness Network, one of the lead organizations in the successful campaign to close the Vermont Yankee Reactor, and co-founder of Alliance for a Green Economy in New York. Welcome to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*, Tim Judson.

**Tim Judson:** Yeah, thanks. I'm really happy to be here.

**Ralph Nader:** Yeah, welcome, Tim. You've been at this a long time. You must be surprised that a failing industry, called the nuclear power plant industry, which is run by electric utility CEOs who don't really want any more nuclear plants, is experiencing a renaissance of support by some government agencies, the manufacturers of nuclear plants, as well as all too many people who should know better, even in the environmental movement.

Tell us just briefly, before we get into the absurd bill that passed the House recently, why investing in nuclear power, and there have only been three plants built in the last 45 years or so, is a bad thing, both economically and from a health, safety, and environmental point of view.

**Tim Judson:** Sure, Ralph. What we say, specifically with respect to the crisis that we have in front of us with climate change, is that nuclear power is too dirty, too dangerous, too expensive, and too slow. So what the industry has done is managed to figure out ways to fail over and over again, and yet still be considered a serious contender for investments in our energy future.

What we see time and again, and this has happened in spades in the US in the last decade, is that nuclear power plants, when they actually get built, are much more expensive than they were originally advertised as. The construction takes much longer than originally projected, and frequently they end up being canceled, even after they've spent billions of dollars. When utilities decide to build these reactors, they can put the rate payers, their consumers, on the hook for the full cost of it, and basically aren't exposed to any risk themselves.

**Ralph Nader:** As an example, Tim, tell us about the Georgia nuclear plants, the ones that were proposed and charged prematurely to the consumer in South Carolina and Florida in recent years that have been scrapped.

**Tim Judson:** These were reactors that were proposed back in 2007, by utilities in Georgia and South Carolina, along with about 26 other reactors in the country that were proposed around the same time. But the two projects in Georgia and South Carolina were the only ones that ever broke ground. And there, you already have almost a 90% failure rate for reactor projects, to build two reactors in each of these states, and they were originally expected to cost around \$14 billion for each project. That was back in 2013 when they began construction, and they were supposed to get built within five years. Now we're in 2024.

The first reactor at the Georgia project was completed last summer after 10 years of construction. And the second one is fitfully coming online now. The project in South Carolina was canceled in 2017 after the utilities had spent \$9 billion building it, and they bankrupted the largest utility in South Carolina as a result of that. And the executives from Westinghouse and in that utility called SCANA have been prosecuted for fraud before the South Carolina Utility Commission. This project in Georgia is now being completed, but at a cost of over \$35 billion. So it's two and a half times as expensive as what they originally said it was going to be.

**Ralph Nader:** And who's paying for all this?

**Tim Judson:** Georgia has been paying for this project for over 10 years. In fact, the average household in Georgia has already paid a thousand dollars on their utility bills for the construction of this reactor before it ever generated one-kilowatt hour of electricity.

**Ralph Nader:** Let's take a broader frame of reference here. How many nuclear plants are there? How many would you consider aging? How many are being relicensed? And how much do they contribute to the total electricity output in the United States?

**Tim Judson:** We have 93 operating nuclear reactors in the country right now. That's down from 105 ten or eleven years ago. There's actually been an attrition of reactors, because they've been getting older and more expensive to operate and maintain. They generate about 770 million megawatt hours of electricity. That's a big number that doesn't mean much, but about 18.8% of our electricity came from nuclear power in 2022. So that sounds like a lot, but it's actually a declining share. And renewables have surpassed nuclear power in terms of our total electricity supply as of a couple of years ago.

**Ralph Nader:** Meaning what when you say renewables?

**Tim Judson:** Solar, wind, hydro, geothermal, and they count biomass as renewable energy, which is debatable whether it should be or not. But the vast majority of that is wind, solar, and hydro.

**Ralph Nader:** And how do you account for the failure to provide a permanent repository for the deadly radioactive waste that is piling up next to nuclear plants—fuel rods, and hot water—and there's still no place to put them, because they have to be considered secure for over 200,000 years?

**Tim Judson:** Yeah. We have a law in this country that says that the priority should be, in terms of our nuclear waste policy, to build a permanent repository where the waste can remain isolated from the environment for these immense, almost geologic periods of time. But it's been steered politically in the wrong direction.

So back in the '80s, after the law was passed, they were supposed to start looking for sites for the first repository. And when it became clear that states didn't want the federal government to tell them they had to hold all the nation's nuclear waste, they settled on Nevada, because at the time, Nevada only had one representative in Congress, and it was called the Screw Nevada Bill. It turns out the place they wanted to put it in Nevada is on Native American land, a place called Yucca Mountain, which is not geologically suitable to build a nuclear waste repository.

So as they were investigating it, they basically kept on coming up with evidence that there was too much water in the site, that it was not geologically stable. There were magma pockets nearby, but they went ahead and certified it anyway. And as it became clear that Nevada was going to seriously oppose this and file lawsuits, and it was going to be politically infeasible to actually get this thing built, the [Barack] Obama administration canceled it.

But the law still says the only place you can put nuclear waste is Yucca Mountain. And Congress and the industry have basically refused to go back and restart the nuclear repository program. I think basically because the industry doesn't really want a solution. It just wants to not have to pay for storing their waste. So right now the industry is suing the Department of Energy every few years to get compensated for storing the waste at their reactor sites. The industry is happy with this as their solution, as it means that they get to...

**Ralph Nader:** Yeah, I call it corporate socialism. Listeners should know that this very complex system called the nuclear fuel cycle that starts with uranium mines out West, piling up radioactive tailings, which have exposed people downwind to radioactive hazards, including Native American

areas. And then they have to enrich the uranium, and that is often done by burning coal, which pollutes the air and contributes to climate disruption. Then they have to fabricate the fuel rods and build the nuclear plant, and then they have to make sure that these nuclear plants are secure against sabotage. Then there's the problem of transporting, by trucks or rail, radioactive waste, to some depositories that don't exist. And they have to go through obviously towns, cities, villages. And what is all this for? Listen, listeners, it's to boil water. That's what all this is for. To boil water, to produce steam, to put the turbines in action. That's what it's for.

How do you educate new reporters who are swallowing this rebirth of nuclear power, the new smaller models, people like Kenneth Chang of *The New York Times* and others, because they don't have an understanding of the history of nuclear power, its excessive cost, its near disasters, Three Mile Island, for example, the Fermi reactor right outside of Detroit and other similar near-misses. When you talk to reporters, especially ones that are younger and are swallowing this propaganda, how do you talk to them, Tim?

**Tim Judson:** We've got to present them with the facts. The problem is that a lot of the discussion about nuclear energy is happening in a fact-free environment. So, a tremendous amount of industry PR is saturating the media without any reference to what's actually happening and what actually has happened.

So, I tell stories like I just did around the Vogtle project in Georgia and how much more expensive it's been, how much longer it's taken, and you've got to present the alternative, which is that if Georgia utilities had started investing in energy efficiency and renewables 16 years ago instead of this nuclear project, they would have reduced emissions by way more than this power plant could ever claim to. And Georgian's bills would have been significantly cheaper than they are today.

**Ralph Nader:** What you're saying is if the same amount of investment poured into this gigantic rat hole called nuclear power was put into energy conservation of buildings and homes, and if it was put into solar energy, passive solar energy architecture, solar thermal, solar photovoltaic, and wind power, it would produce far more power faster, cheaper, safer with more decentralization, less reliant on national security risks that nuclear power reflects as well as creating more jobs. Isn't that correct?

**Tim Judson:** That's right. One of the key examples is what happened in New York about eight years ago, where the governor decided that he wanted to bail out the old nuclear plants in New York State, because they were becoming uneconomical. They were losing a lot of money and the operators wanted to close them. He decided that it was better for him politically to push through a \$7.5 billion bailout for these four reactors.

At the time that that was decided by the Public Service Commission, the utility regulator in New York, there was a study presented to them that showed that if the state instead had gone with an energy efficiency program, ordering the utilities to invest in energy efficiency and helping their customers save money on their home electric bills, it would have come at a net cost savings to consumers of \$2.3 billion by 2030. And that it would have cut electricity use in New York by as much as those nuclear reactors did.

But what they did instead, was bail out these reactors for \$7.5 billion. And New Yorkers are now paying more for their electricity because of it. The State would have had \$10 billion more to invest in renewables and other climate programs instead of keeping these old reactors.

**Ralph Nader:** Another aspect, you're talking about Governor Andrew Cuomo, he and Hillary Clinton actually came out for closing the Indian Point plant 30 miles north of Manhattan. Imagine millions of people exposed to radioactive leaks there and unable to evacuate in time. Tell us the story of Indian Point.

**Tim Judson:** Indian Point was this nuclear power plant that was, like you said, built 30 miles north of New York City on the Hudson River. The first reactor built there didn't even have a backup safety system and ran for 10 years that way before it was closed down. The other two reactors were built in the mid-70s and finally closed in 2021, thankfully, because Governor Cuomo did the right thing on that.

But for 40 years, we had these two reactors running on the Hudson River that could have had nuclear meltdowns because they're also situated next to an earthquake fault line that was more active than they knew when they built them. And was under the flight path of one of the jets that was targeted at the World Trade Center on 9/11, that could have caused over a trillion dollars in economic damage if there was a meltdown at one of those reactors and caused the deaths and the contamination and the illnesses of hundreds of thousands of people. Rightfully, Governor Cuomo saw that that was completely insane and worked for the closure of Indian Point, but he had a different political calculus about the other nukes in the state.

**Ralph Nader:** Well, we have over 90 of these plants operating now, and each one of them has an evacuation plan in case of a disaster or a mishap. Tell us a little bit about the status of these evacuation plans.

**Tim Judson:** The evacuation plans for each of the reactors—they're still required to have, at least for the current reactors that are still operating—usually exist at the county emergency planning office. They used to mail things to people's houses, but now that mostly doesn't happen anymore. It, of course, varies by jurisdiction. So if you're in Oswego County, New York, where there's three reactors, it's going to be different than if you're in another state or another community.

But most of these areas have available potassium iodide pills, which are a prophylactic you can use to protect your thyroid from radiation when there's a nuclear meltdown. But you've got to go pick those up yourself. They don't just mail them to you. So, basically, it's all on the residents of the area to take the steps proactively to protect themselves.

A lot of the communities have emergency sirens that would activate in the case of an emergency. Those don't always work. They test them periodically, and a lot of times they're not operational. And then, you're supposed to get yourself out of there or shelter in place, is what they say. It's to shelter at home, depending on essentially what the company decides to tell you to do.

**Ralph Nader:** Why aren't they online?

**Tim Judson:** I think in a lot of places they are online, but not everybody has great internet access. Not everyone even knows to look.

**Ralph Nader:** Nuclear power is a classic case supported by Republicans as well as Democrats of corporate guaranteed capitalism. Without the US government, in all kinds of ways, providing free research and development at the beginning of the nuclear power age, insuring the nuclear power industry.... Listeners, this is an industry where the insurers are so freaked out at the limitless risk of nuclear power plant mishaps or disasters that they barely insure this industry. And there's a law called the Price-Anderson Act, which, in effect, puts the burden of insurance on the back of the American taxpayer. Can you elaborate that, Tim?

**Tim Judson:** Sure. The nuclear industry has been covered by the Price-Anderson Act since 1957. It's been renewed every so often to extend it, and that caps the industry's liability at a certain level. So there's what they call an insurance pool that the industry pays into that amounts to about \$14 billion under this new extension that just got passed. It would be about \$14 billion that is paid by the entire industry. So it's not that each reactor has \$14 billion. The entire industry pays into this fund.

Beyond that level, it's up to Congress whether they would fund any further compensation to people for their losses. And in fact, the other aspect of the Price-Anderson Act, is that it exempts insurance carriers from providing coverage to individuals and homeowners and businesses for losses due to a nuclear disaster. So just about every insurance policy you have for your home or your business or whatever, you'll find a nuclear exclusion clause that's attributable to Price-Anderson Act.

**Ralph Nader:** Let's go to Hanford, Washington, where there's a long history, starting with the development of the atomic bomb of government involvement, private contractors, big companies contracting to manage it. And there have been leaks heading toward the Columbia River through the tanks that haven't been able to hold onto this waste safely for decades. What's the situation there?

**Tim Judson:** I'm glad you raised it because it's actually relevant to what's going on right now. Hanford was one of the nuclear bomb processing factories. And so what they did in Hanford was they reprocessed fuel from nuclear reactors to extract plutonium for building nuclear bombs. The nuclear reprocessing process is one of the dirtiest and most dangerous environmental hazards that you can create.

There are just massive amounts of really radioactive waste, very acidic, because they dissolve the nuclear fuel in acid, and then it creates this massively complicated and toxic liquid waste that they were producing on a massive scale during the Cold War (1947-1991). They were basically just putting tanks in the ground to store this stuff in without a lot of concern for how long it was going to be there and how these tanks were going to hold up, and they started to leak.

~~And so~~ Now you have millions of gallons of this really incredibly radioactive and toxic waste sitting in these underground tanks at Hanford next to the Columbia River that have started to leak. And they've been scrambling for decades now to try to somehow solidify and package this waste in a more secure way, which has cost billions and billions of dollars. There's always delays. The companies that they hire to do this are always running into problems and contaminating workers and other things as well.

And what's crazy about this is that every place where they've reprocessed nuclear waste has these same problems. We have one of the most contaminated sites in America, in Western New York,

at a place where they commercially reprocessed nuclear power waste. They did it for five or six years, and it's taken them over 40 years to start cleaning it up. It's still nowhere near done. The crazy thing is that the industry now wants to start reprocessing waste again. So the Nuclear Regulatory Commission is starting to review applications for licenses to build reprocessing plants. There's no end to just how hazardous this industry has been and will continue to be until we phase it out.

**Ralph Nader:** Keep in mind, listeners, when you hear our list, the purpose of nuclear power is to boil water, to produce steam.

Let's talk about, again, the propaganda that's building on small reactors. The industry says, "Well, we can build smaller reactors, and they're safer, and they're not going to contaminate an area the size of Pennsylvania." And every proposal I've read about where these new companies, including one owned primarily by Bill Gates Jr., are in Washington [DC] demanding that taxpayers pay for the research and development and guarantee against any losses. So the government absorbs the losses, and any profits accrue to the companies. Tell us about the latest nuclear power proposal here.

**Tim Judson:** Because of the failure of these big reactor projects in Georgia and South Carolina, the industry can't justify building any more of those, so their only other option in the last decade has been to start talking about how they can build reactors cheaper and smarter by building them small. They've now got this concept for what they're calling small modular nuclear reactors. Then there's a bunch of startup companies that are being financed by Silicon Valley tech investors to design and, at least in their scheme, to build them. But they're really not getting anywhere very fast.

One of these companies, just as an example, is called NuScale. They're still around. They were the first out of the gate with these SMR [small modular reactor] proposals. And they had gotten some small utilities in Utah and the Northwest to sign up to buy the power, so that they could start working on the project. They actually canceled it in November [2023] after working on it for 10 years before they ever got a license, before they ever put a shovel in the ground, because their cost had already tripled from what they originally said it was going to cost. And no more utilities would sign up to buy the power.

~~And so~~ What we already see happening with SMR is their costs are already skyrocketing before they even get a license for one of these things, in the same way that they've done for the large reactors. And there's reasons for it. The industry started to build really large reactors back in the '60s and '70s because they realized that the only way to reduce their costs was to build them large. And small reactors were already too expensive back then. Now what they're basically saying is if we build them small, we can build them in factories and then we'll make it like building cars or airplanes. They haven't built a factory for these things yet, so the first ones they build are going to be every bit as expensive as the large ones.

**Ralph Nader:** I remember many years ago, I spent a summer in the Oak Ridge National Lab, for a summer seminar, and I met the director of the lab who was a very thoughtful physicist, Dr. Alvin Weinberg. And in the discussion, I talked to him about the worst scenario for a nuclear plant. He basically said that nobody wants to know what it is, even if they could figure out what the worst scenario is.

But after the discussion developed, he came out with an astounding observation. He said, “The moment solar energy comes down to no more than two and a half times as expensive as nuclear, I will support solar and urge nuclear power to be suspended.” He was a great supporter of nuclear power, but he also was very worried about the hazards. He recommended in his words “a nuclear priesthood of superb engineers and scientists managing clusters of nuclear power” like 12 of them or six of them, in one area, in order to minimize all the risks that you've been talking about, including the risks of sabotage.

So here we are in a capitalist society, where price is supposed to be determinative. And all over the world, not just in the US, according to physicist Amory Lovins, who you know, solar and wind power are beatin’ the heck out of any nuclear power on price alone. So why is Congress disregarding the price mechanism? And the House of Representatives with overwhelming Democratic and Republican support, a few days ago, passed what is called the Atomic Energy Advancement Act, and there were only 36 votes in dissent and 365 votes in favor. How can Congress have their head in the sand to that level? Where is the opposition to get more progressives and more people who are worried about costs and national security, to oppose a bill like that? Can you explain that to the listeners, Tim Judson?

**Tim Judson:** Sure. You're not going to be surprised to hear this, Ralph, but I think the answer is that the utility companies don't want to transition to renewable energy, and certainly not in a way that's as beneficial as it should be to consumers/the American people. The utility industry has been, for over 100 years, running the electricity system in this country by operating large, centralized power plants that they control and that they get massive profit margins approved by state utility commissions to continue to do it.

Their business model is based on operating nuclear power plants and coal power plants and gas power plants that they can get the state utility commissions to approve and let them run and charge ratepayers for. If people are benefiting from energy efficiency—having solar in their homes or in their neighborhoods or in their communities—that's less electricity that these utilities are going to be able to control and charge people for.

So the utility industry, and this is something that I researched myself, in 2021 and 2022, when the big infrastructure bills, the bipartisan infrastructure bill and the Inflation Reduction Act were being passed by Congress, the utility industry spent \$192 million on federal lobbying in those two years. That's more than the oil industry spent in those two years on lobbying. These are the utility companies that are present in every community around the country. And their business is actually less selling electricity and natural gas and more in lobbying state and federal governments to get their rates approved.

What's really going on is that the utility industry, and the nuclear industry as a subset of that, have been lobbying Congress relentlessly for years right now, to protect what they've got. They've created an echo chamber in Congress around nuclear energy by basically hiring every lobbyist in town.

**Ralph Nader:** To assuage any concern by our listeners, as Senator Ed [Edward] Markey, who has been a formidable opponent of nuclear power for decades, has informed us, this bill in the House is going nowhere in the Senate. He is persuaded that he has the ways and the votes to block it. But the Senate has its own version, which is not as draconian, a government-guaranteed process here.



Years ago, the industry came up with another version of nuclear power. Instead of fission, they called it fusion. And I remember that the first scientists were at Princeton in the 1950s, and they latched onto basically a honeypot from the Atomic Energy Commission, and every once in a while, they'd call up their scientific reporters at the *New York Times* and say, "Hey, we got a little breakthrough here." And without any critical appraisal, the report in the *New York Times* would ditto-head their unsubstantiated optimism.

Now, fast forward. This fusion reactor nonsense is reappearing with a big lobbying effort in Congress, in the United Kingdom, and some other places around the world. And again, reporters without historical knowledge or empirical evidence are reporting the prospects of an infinite supply of fusion energy, clean, safe, around the corner. Well, the best fusion reactor we'll ever have is the sun. It's going to be around for at least 4 billion years. Your response on this drive to have the government basically guarantee corporate welfare in the development of fusion power? And what do you think of the recent so-called breakthrough?

**Tim Judson:** You're right. The government has been putting billions of dollars into fusion research for decades, and it's yielded very, very little, in fact. And it's partly because the actual mechanics of trying to generate electricity from fusion have proven to be almost impossible. So you're right that every few years, there's some experiment they run that turns out purportedly better than the last one.

But the thing about it is, and this was actually the announcement that came out about a year and a half ago, they finally, for the first time, got more energy out of a fusion reaction than they put into it to make it happen. This is after decades of research. They finally got a little more energy out of a fusion reaction than it took to create it. It happened for a microsecond. They haven't repeated that result since then, because the process they used was really complicated and difficult to reproduce.

Fusion is one of these technologies that's always been 30 years away. Whenever there's an announcement about advanced fusion research, it's still going to be 30 years before we get a reactor going. Now there's a lot more hype, and there's, again, these tech investors who are putting money into fusion, with the promise that they're going to have a reactor online in a few years, but there's no track record to suggest that that's going to happen. It's one of these things where it keeps the dream of nuclear alive. We could have infinite amounts of clean energy for the future. It sounds too good to be true, and it's always proven to be too good to be true.

**Ralph Nader:** Well, the 365 to 36 House vote a couple weeks ago supporting the Atomic Energy Advancement Act, the *New York Times* said that "it received backing from Democrats who support nuclear power because it does not emit greenhouse gasses and can generate electricity 24 hours a day to supplement solar and wind power." This is what is luring some otherwise smart environmental groups to leave the door open as part of the mix of our future energy sources. Can you respond to that quote that I just conveyed to you?

**Tim Judson:** Sure, yeah. There's a tremendous amount of disinformation about the way that nuclear power plants work that contributes to this. The notion that they're capitalizing on is that they've already done a lot of work causing doubts about whether solar and wind can actually provide a stable electricity supply for the country. So, they've cracked open that door of doubt about renewables

And then they're asserting that nuclear is the only way to fill the gap. The trouble is that the electricity grid doesn't really work that way. The nuclear plants and renewables actually don't pair very well because nuclear plants tend to be these large generators that have to run at 100% all the time. They're really inflexible. And that doesn't work well with solar and wind with a grid that, that would run with a lot of solar and wind electricity.

In fact, the reason that Pacific Gas and Electric, the big utility in California, decided to close the Diablo Canyon nuclear power plant, eight or ten years ago, was because it realized that as the amount of solar and wind electricity they had on the grid was increasing, Diablo Canyon was going to cause a problem because it was going to make the grid less reliable and less able to manage renewable energy. So it was going to phase it out by 2025. And they had a plan to ramp up renewables to make sure that when Diablo Canyon closed, there wouldn't be any fossil fuels that would rush in to fill the gap.

And that's, in fact, still the case. But there's been so much of this nuclear industry propaganda about how important nukes are for keeping the grid reliable, that it has caused the governor of California to backtrack the plan to close the nuclear plant. And it's going to be massively more expensive for consumers to continue running Diablo Canyon, and they're already going to have way more renewable energy than they need to replace it by the time it's shut down next year.

**Ralph Nader:** Just to show what a superhighway of broken projections nuclear power has had historically, in the 1960s, the Atomic Energy Commission predicted there would be 100 nuclear plants in California alone, up and down the coast. Now, there's one left. Tell us about these projections and respond to the claim that that's all due to overregulation and regulatory delays.

**Tim Judson:** I wish that was the case, that nuclear power was so regulated that it was hard to build reactors. It's just not the case. The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has only denied one application for a nuclear reactor in its history. And that only happened a couple of years ago because the company that filed the application couldn't actually fill in all the information. But every other reactor that's applied for a license has either received it or they've withdrawn the application because they decided not to build a plant.

The real thing that's caused the nuclear energy industry to fail over and over again is just that its technology is too expensive and too complicated, it takes too long, and at a certain point, people get tired of paying for something that's way more expensive and too dangerous.

**Ralph Nader:** Well, the media has been really a ditto head propaganda arm. I'm tired of reading the *Washington Post* and *New York Times*. I've called up the reporters and saying, "Why are they being shilled?" Because they write this propaganda and they hardly ever quote Beyond Nuclear. They don't quote people who really know what they're talking about. Can you characterize the response of the *Wall Street Journal*, *Washington Post*, *New York Times*, and AP, for example? Why are they so close-minded on this? They do have open minds on a lot of other environmental hazards.

**Tim Judson:** Yeah, I can only imagine, Ralph, this is one of the consequences of the millions and millions of dollars that the industry puts into public relations. I think that they are lobbying news editors and reporters all the time to run stories that are favorable. And they've got a slick pitch. It just doesn't happen to be based on a lot of facts. There's a cognitive dissonance around this issue

in the media between the rosy stories that reporters and news editors are hearing from the nuclear industry and what the reality is.

**Ralph Nader:** I think also part of it, Tim, is the lack of consistent outspokenness on the dangers and costs and boondoggles of nuclear power by members of Congress. We're left with Senator Edward Markey. There should be many more speaking out against that who have taken the right position and are impervious to PAC (public action committee) contributions. There are always a few there, but they don't seem to be coordinating it at all.

And the academic community doesn't have the likes of Nobel Prize winner Henry Kendall of MIT, who so thoroughly blew the whistle on nuclear power in the 1970s and informed the press together with his colleague, Daniel Ford, about the downsides and the risks and the costs and had quite an influence on Ed Markey and others in the Congress. What do you think of that explanation?

**Tim Judson:** Yeah, I think that's a big piece of it too. And part of what's also going on in academia is that the nuclear industry is providing a lot of funding to university engineering programs. even at the local level, the nuclear industry makes a lot of contributions to STEM programs in the primary schools. So there's this economic dependency that our higher education and primary education institutions have on this industry.

**Ralph Nader:** Let's give Steve and Hannah a chance to get in this discussion. Steve?

**Steve Skrovan:** Tim, I know once this episode airs, we're going to get comments from listeners who are talking about *what about the (MSR) molten salt thorium reactors?* I don't even know if I'm getting that correct, but that has something to do with salt and thorium and molten. And that's another one just like the small reactor argument, that *this was never given a chance*, and *this is safe*. What is your response to that?

**Tim Judson:** Again, it's another iteration of the fusion argument, like nuclear power would work great if we just did it this way. The trouble is that they already tried to build those type of reactors back in the 50s and 60s, and they didn't work very well, so we ended up with the reactors we've got now. At least they've been able to run them economically with all the bailouts and everything that they've had. They at least were more feasible to build and operate than these other types of reactors—molten salt reactors, liquid sodium reactors, high-temperature gas-cooled reactors (HTGR), thorium reactors. And thorium reactors, especially present even more significant dangers in some ways, because they're prone to producing nuclear weapons materials with thorium reactors. And India's had a thorium program for decades. It's just never proved feasible for them to actually get a start. It's always the thing that we're not doing now that the industry wants to say is going to be our next great hope, but it just never pans out.

**Ralph Nader:** Hannah?

**Hannah Feldman:** Tim, if the Atomic Energy Advancement Act were passed through the Senate and signed by the president as it is, what changes would it affect? What would happen if it passed?

**Tim Judson:** One of the things, as Ralph mentioned, is that it would extend the Price-Anderson Act for another 40 years. One of the things that people should understand about this is that the Price-Anderson Act already covers the existing reactors in the country in perpetuity. They're

grandfathered in forever. So this extension is only to make sure that new reactors that haven't been built yet would be covered.

What's crazy about that is that all these new reactors are said to be smaller, safer, they're walk-away safe. They've already gotten the Nuclear Regulatory Commission to roll back its requirements for even having an emergency. And so if they're so safe to operate that we don't need to plan for accidents and disasters and emergencies, then why do they need the coverage of the Price-Anderson Act?

The other things that it does is it puts more pressure on the Nuclear Regulatory Commission to streamline its regulations and its licensing processes. It also puts caps on the fees the industry has to pay the Nuclear Regulatory Commission to get a license. And so it's actually scaling back the regulation of nuclear energy. And one of the most dangerous things that this bill does is that if enacted, it actually tells the NRC to change its mission to include essentially promoting the benefits of nuclear power. And this is a massive, massive mistake.

The NRC was formed in 1975, because Congress realized that it was a conflict of interest to have the same agency regulating nuclear safety and promoting nuclear energy, so it broke up the Atomic Energy Commission and created the Department of Energy to be the Energy Research and Development Agency and the NRC to be the safety regulator and to not have that job of promoting nuclear. This bill, if it were enacted, would be a step towards actually changing that and repeating the mistakes of the past.

If you want to look at how dangerous that can be, all you gotta do is look at Japan. Because after the Fukushima disaster happened 13 years ago this week, one of the root causes that was identified for why that happened was because the Japanese nuclear safety regulators were too tight with the industry and saw it as their job to promote nuclear. So they ignored the need to build defenses against tsunamis from earthquakes for these nuclear plants. And the consequence of that was Fukushima.

**Ralph Nader:** Tim, before we conclude, your thoughts on the *New York Times* two articles this past Sunday on the rise of nuclear weapon threats around the world. Nuclear energy, in ways that many people know, is inextricably related to nuclear weaponry in terms of plutonium and other problems.

What's your view of the collapsing treaty structure between Russia and US given the last remaining nuclear arms treaty expires in two years? And there's no activity by the Biden administration or Congress on strengthening the efforts for proliferation of nuclear weaponry in various countries around the world and restoring a treaty arrangement with both Russia and China, major nuclear weapon countries. What's your view on all this?

**Tim Judson:** Yeah, well, unfortunately, we're in a new Cold War era. The tensions between the US and Russia and China are being framed in a lot of the same ways that they were back when we had a nuclear arms race in the 60s and 70s and 80s.

Unfortunately, the nuclear energy industry is playing a role in this, because one of the lines that they're using to promote the Atomic Energy Advancement Act and all of these investments in nuclear, especially in also cutting deals to export nuclear power plants to other countries, is that

we can't let Russia and China be the ones that are expanding nuclear energy worldwide. It's got to be the US that does it.

The trouble is that whenever you have a nuclear power plant, you've got everything you need to start making nuclear weapons, because you're generating plutonium in the reactors, and you're relying on enriched uranium. The US (Biden administration) cut a deal with Saudi Arabia last year, to export US nuclear energy technology to Saudi Arabia, including uranium enrichment capacity, which is what you need to be able to make nuclear bombs and what they've been so upset about with Iran for over the last 15 years.

The trouble is that the nuclear nonproliferation treaty, that is the main global framework for how to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons, has always used access to nuclear energy as the carrot to get countries to agree not to develop nuclear weapons. That's always been a contradiction, because, again, whenever you have nuclear power, you've got everything you need to have a nuclear weapons system. That's where we're in a really dire spot right now with the way that these issues are playing out globally.

**Ralph Nader:** Tim, can you tell our listeners slowly how they can access your very informative and clear website for NIRS?

**Tim Judson:** Yeah, thanks, Ralph. It's really much shorter than our name. It's [www.nirs.org](http://www.nirs.org). You can find a lot of great information there. We have even a section for nuclear basics that has a frequently asked questions section that will give you a ton of great information about nuclear power, the nuclear fuel chain, radioactive waste, and what we need to be doing to fight climate change.

**Ralph Nader:** Listeners, that's NIRS.org. Thank you very much, Tim Judson.

**Tim Judson:** Yeah, thanks. This has been great. Really glad we did this.

**Steve Skrovan:** We've been speaking with Tim Judson. We will link to the Nuclear Information Resource Service at [ralphnaderradiohour.com](http://ralphnaderradiohour.com). Up next, Ralph is going to talk about the death of Boeing whistleblower John Barnett, and also respond to the considerable amount of pushback we got on last week's interview with Barbara McQuade. But first, let's check 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, March 15th, 2024, I'm Russell Mokhiber. Consistent evidence shows that diets high in ultra-processed food are associated with an increased risk of 32 damaging health outcomes. That's according to a report from CBS News.

A British medical journal study found higher exposure to these foods can be harmful to health in a variety of ways, including higher risk for cancer, major heart and lung conditions, gastrointestinal issues, obesity, type 2 diabetes, sleep issues, mental health disorders and early death. Ultra-processed foods, which "undergo multiple industrial processes and often contain colors, emulsifiers, flavors, and other additives," include products such as packaged baked goods, snacks, carbonated soft drinks, and sugary cereals. 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 Hannah and the rest of the team. Back in November of 2019, we interviewed John Barnett, the quality control manager overseeing the 787 Dreamliner at one of our favorite corporations, Boeing. Mr. Barnett was giving a deposition in that case this past week when he was found dead in his truck at the hotel where he was staying. Ralph, would you like to comment about the death of John Barnett?

**Ralph Nader:** This was truly tragic. John Barnett was the quality control inspector for Boeing. He worked for Boeing for 32 years until he retired in 2017. He was very happy with Boeing when he was working at the plant near Seattle. But he witnessed the deterioration in production line quality control.

And in 2019, among many interviews that he gave to the mass media, he told the BBC that under pressure, workers had been deliberately fitting substandard parts to aircraft on the production line for the 787 Dreamliner. He also said he uncovered serious problems with the oxygen systems, which could render more than a few of them unworkable in a sudden emergency. He summed up his criticisms of the deterioration of quality control standards at this plant in North Charleston, South Carolina, by saying he would never have his family fly on a 787 Dreamliner.

He was in the middle of extensive depositions over three days with Boeing lawyers and his lawyers in a hotel in Charleston, South Carolina. And in the middle of that three-day period, he was found dead in his truck in the parking lot of the hotel, presumably, but not finally decided from a self-inflicted gunshot wound.

The tragedy is that you had a salt-of-the-earth type quality control protecting millions of airline passengers. That was always in his vision as he went around the plant. And you had someone like John Barnett, who instead of being rewarded and promoted and supported, was undermined by the managers of the plant directed by Boeing in Seattle, Washington, and put under tremendous pressure, which led to his retirement.

Since then, as people know, there have been all kinds of problems with Boeing 737 MAXs. The Federal Aviation Agency, untypically, has put out a report saying that a six-week audit of the company has found "multiple instances where the company allegedly failed to comply with manufacturing quality control requirements."

Then a preliminary report from the nonpartisan US National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) suggested that the four key bolts designed to hold the door security in place, in that close call above Portland for Alaska Airlines 737 MAX-10, were not fitted properly, and they had other criticisms as well. So Boeing is in deep trouble again.

The Justice Department has to decide whether to reopen the criminal prosecution of Boeing, which it settled under a deferred prosecution agreement, often called by critics a sweetheart agreement, but it was based on Boeing behaving itself for two years after the settlement. And the two years are up. Now the Justice Department has to figure out whether to let Boeing go or whether to reopen the criminal prosecution.

This is all to say that people like John Barnett should be heralded and not suppressed and have their workplaces impossible to execute their duties and their trust relationship with millions of airline passengers who rely on their work being efficacious to produce safe planes.

**Steve Skrovan:** Ralph, what is the status of the 787 Dreamliner? Is that in the air? Is that flying? If it is, do we need to avoid it?

**Ralph Nader:** It's flying all over the world. And then in a coincidence, a Dreamliner flying out of Sydney, Australia, heading for Auckland in New Zealand, suddenly plummeted for two or three seconds straight down, and 50 passengers who were not belted hit the ceiling or other parts of the plane, and on landing, had to be taken to the hospital, one in serious condition. The Chilean airline, LATAM, [formerly known as LAM] described the episode as a technical factor. And we're now waiting to see whether that technical factor relates to the design, construction, and quality-control inspection of the Dreamliner back in North Charleston, South Carolina.

**Steve Skrovan:** And it's flying in America?

**Ralph Nader:** Yes. It's flying everywhere. And I'm surprised you haven't flown it yet, Steve.

**Steve Skrovan:** I may have, and not know it. That's why I want to ask you what flyers should do to protect themselves from this.

**Ralph Nader:** Well, if you rely on John Barnett, you avoid it. Try to get another model plane going into the same destination.

**Steve Skrovan:** And you can find that out how, just as a practical issue?

**Ralph Nader:** Well, go to [flyersrights.org](http://flyersrights.org), where Paul Hudson has information on the Dreamliner. That's the leading consumer safety aviation group that's been around. We helped start its previous group, the Aviation Consumer Action Project, that later turned into FlyersRights.

**Hannah Feldman:** To answer your question, Steve, as a consumer, whenever I book travel, I don't fly on Boeing planes. I pick my airlines based on whether or not they use Boeing. And when you book your flight, on whatever platform you're using, you can view the type of aircraft. So in the moment when you're booking, you can filter out planes you don't trust.

**Steve Skrovan:** Very good. That's what I was looking for. Thank you for that, Ralph. And I would recommend people go into our search on [ralphnaderadioair.com](http://ralphnaderadioair.com) if you're interested in hearing what John Barnett and Ralph talked about back in November of 2019.

Now, we're going to talk about some considerable pushback we got on our guest last week, Barbara McQuade, whose book *Attack from Within* about disinformation and misinformation in the political realm, created a stir among our listeners. The stir traveled along two lines. One line was the fact that Ms. McQuade is also an MSNBC commentator and that they thought that she was, as such, a Democratic operative. And the other had to do with the issue of anonymity, which both Ms. McQuade and Ralph discussed. And I'll read a couple other things.

This came from Mike Rube, who said, "Interviewing Democratic operatives and pretending that they are independent is a form of propaganda." And he writes, "The irony is rich when an expert and bestselling author on disinformation references Russian social media influencing the 2016 election, a theory that has been heavily questioned." So, Ralph, what do you have to say about some of that feedback?

**Ralph Nader:** Well, first of all, it was very thoughtful, regardless of where they came out. They weren't writing in soundbites. The second is, I share their skepticism about MSNBC without concluding that everybody who goes on there has got an ax to grind in terms of inaccuracy or misinformation.

The way to evaluate MSNBC, first, is to know that it was once owned by General Electric that directed their subordinate at MSNBC to fire Phil Donahue, who had the best rating program on MSNBC, because he had the temerity in early 2003 to put on people critical of the lies that [George W.] Bush and [Dick] Cheney spread around the country to justify their criminal and destructive invasion of Iraq. Having said that, another way to evaluate MSNBC is why they have a stable of regular commentators, again and again, the same people. And the third way to evaluate MSNBC is to think about the people who never get on or who get on once and are never invited back because they were perhaps too progressive and too challenging of the corporate establishment.

There are a lot of good people that never get on MSNBC and are kept off because they're progressive. I once talked to an editor at MSNBC and said, "You know the difference between a liberal and a progressive? You let liberals on. They're often corporate liberals, but you don't let real progressives on." And I gave them some names that are known to our listeners.

So on the issue of anonymity, they made claims for the benefits of anonymity that are worth discussing in the context of claims on the drawbacks of anonymity. And I'm going to have a program devoted to anonymity, and we'll invite Law Professor Robert Fellmeth at the University of San Diego Law School, and we can talk about Silicon Valley and anonymity over the internet, as well as other kinds of anonymities in other contexts to see where the equities fall out. That is either no anonymity, full disclosure, or a person has to give a reason for claiming anonymity before getting it. So look forward to that program, listeners, and keep the comments coming.

**Steve Skrovan:** Yes, thank you for the comments. They were mostly very thoughtful, and if not a little hurtful at some point, but that's okay, we could take it. I want to thank our guest again, Tim Judson. 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" featuring Francesco DeSantis with "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.

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

**Steve Skrovan:** The American Museum of Tort Law has gone virtual. Go to [tortmuseum.org](http://tortmuseum.org) to explore the exhibits, take a virtual tour, and learn about iconic tort cases from history. And don't forget, register for our upcoming live virtual taping with bad-faith insurance expert Bill Shernoff on Wednesday, March 27th, 2:00 PM Eastern. Join us for our live Zoom event.

**Hannah Feldman:** We have a new issue of the *Capitol Hill Citizen* out now. To order your copy of the *Capitol Hill Citizen* "Democracy Dies in Broad Daylight," go to [capitolhillcitizen.com](http://capitolhillcitizen.com).

**Steve Skrovan:** Remember to continue the conversation after each show, go to the comments section, like many of you did last week, at [ralphnaderradiohour.com](http://ralphnaderradiohour.com). Post a comment, a question on this week's episode. We read them all.



**Hannah Feldman:** The producers of the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour* are Jimmy Lee Wirt and Matthew Marran. Our executive producer is Alan Minsky.

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

**Hannah Feldman:** Join us next week on the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*. Thank you, Ralph.

**Ralph Nader:** Thank you, everybody. Well, the supply of the *Capitol Hill Citizen* recent edition is out. It's being reprinted. If you want to get copies, go to [capitolhillcitizen.com](http://capitolhillcitizen.com). People rave about it and for good reason. It fills a huge gap in covering Congress and empowers people to become Capitol Hill citizens themselves.