

RALPH NADER RADIO HOUR EP 332 TRANSCRIPT

Steve Skrovan: It's the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*.

[Music] Stand up, stand up, you've been sitting way too long.

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

David Feldman: Hello, everybody.

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

Ralph Nader: Hello, everybody.

Steve Skrovan: Ralph, you wanted to open the show. You got a few things to say.

Ralph Nader: Yeah. Boeing has lost more than 800 orders by airlines for the 737 MAX so far this year. Still moving ahead to try to, by September, give it the okay to fly. There are more defects being documented in the 737 MAX that haven't been investigated by congressional committees yet, or openly by the FAA. So I just wanted to bring all this up to date. There will be more cancellations, analysts predict. And Boeing is discounting the price to try to hold its existing orders.

The second news was a sad one. Edward Kleinbard, a corporate tax lawyer who worked for corporate tax firms for years and then turned against what they were doing--getting loopholes from multinational corporations like Apple and Google and international banks and so forth--went to teach at the law school at the University of Southern California. The *New York Times*, where he was a regular contributor before he lost his struggle with cancer, [July 10, 2020] said of him, "Most tax policy discussions were backward. Policymakers should identify their spending priorities, ideally to invest in the country's citizens and then discuss the proper tax policies to pay for them." And I'm quoting him again in an article he wrote. "The starting point in every case should not be determined by establishing an arbitrarily small amount of tax to collect and then treating government like an institutional Procrustes, whose only responsibility is to amputate the welfare of our fellow citizens to suit that amount." And one of his friends who is also a tax lawyer, said that "Edward Kleinbard, by being in academia, that is free to speak out, and by being a good writer, he was able to bring all that to the public attention." All that meaning incredibly clever tax loopholes that often bring the tax rate in reality down to 1%/2%, if that, for these giant corporations that are making billions of dollars of profits every year. So the public has lost a champion, Edward Kleinbard.

Steve Skrovan: Well, that's a great tribute, Ralph. Thanks for that. There's also another piece of business we want to get to before we get to the main part of our show today. A few weeks ago, as many of you recall, we talked to Dr. John Geyman. We said if you emailed him, he would send his book on healthcare reform to your congressperson in your name. And the response was great. So far he's gotten 95 requests; we want to re-up that. If you would like to join in on this effort, you could still email John Geyman with your name and who you want the book sent to. That'll be at jgeyman@uw.edu. That's J-G-E-Y-M-A-N @uw.edu. And we'll also link to it at the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour* website if you didn't catch that.

Ralph Nader: And a few more suggestions, how to make it more effective with your senators and representative. Give your full contact; add a couple of sentences about why you think full Medicare for All should be reflected in your senators' and representative's votes, and ask the senators or representative to acknowledge receipt of the book and to give you a call, because you have other points you want to make and other experiences you want to reflect. If you do all that very concisely, you will triple the likelihood that this is going to get attention in the Washington, D.C., offices of those members of Congress in your state.

Steve Skrovan: There you go, people. You've got your marching orders. We're very pleased with the response so far. Let's keep it going. Our first guest on the show today is Andrew Kimbrell. He has been on the show twice before to talk about why GMOs help corporations and not consumers. And this time, though, he isn't here to talk about genetically modified crops, but rather genetically engineered viruses and how the risks of reckless genetic engineering could potentially lead to more novel viruses. And that's just the first half of the show. In the second half, we're welcoming back Dr. Michael Carome. He is the director of Public Citizen's Health Research Group. We're going to talk to him about the letter Public Citizen released a few days ago directed at President Trump and Vice President Pence. The letter in question lays out the ways this administration has mishandled the coronavirus crisis. The letter is asking for Trump and Pence to step aside and allow public health experts to take charge. In between, we'll take a short break and check in with our corporate crime reporter Russell Mokhiber. But first, let's talk about genetically engineered viruses. David?

David Feldman: Andrew Kimbrell is an internationally recognized public interest attorney, bioethicist and NGO [non-governmental organization] leader. Mr. Kimbrell has been at the forefront of efforts to strictly regulate biotechnology, ensure responsible bio-medical research and eliminate biological weapons research. He is the founder and executive director of the Center for Food Safety, the author of *Your Right to Know: Genetic Engineering and the Secret Changes in Your Food*, and the editor of *Fatal Harvest: The Tragedy of Industrial Agriculture*. Welcome to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*, Andrew Kimbrell.

Andrew Kimbrell: Thanks, Dave. Appreciate the intro.

Ralph Nader: Yeah, welcome indeed, Andy. Before we get to the coronavirus COVID-19 aspect of our discussion, let's start with your point about lack of public knowledge or debate about what researchers around the world are genetically engineering.

Andrew Kimbrell: Yeah, Ralph, I think this is really just an absolutely critical issue that's been lost. The forest has been lost for the trees, if you will. We have talked on your show and you've worked on this a lot about the dangers of genetic engineering of plants, animals, or humans. But we haven't talked much about the danger of genetically engineering viruses. And I think far away from public debate, a small group of scientists over the last 10 or 11 years have used synthetic biology, synthetic virology to be able to do something which is breathtaking. What they've done is they've taken the most dangerous viruses known to man; these are H5N1, bird flu, Marburg, Ebola, SARS, and instead of trying to find vaccines or to make these viruses less lethal, they have actually spent millions of millions of our taxpayer dollars, tens of millions of our taxpayer dollars trying to make these viruses more dangerous by mixing and matching various parts of these viruses with other viruses, genetically engineering them and then using animal experimentation and human cell line experimentation, to make them more transmissible, to make them more lethal, to make them more infectious.

Ralph Nader: Scientifically, why would they want to do this?

Andrew Kimbrell: Well, yeah, I do have a master's degree in psychology and I think I have to sort of rely on that to try and figure out why anybody would want to do this. One prominent virologist has called it the definition of insanity. I think there is a temptation . . . and this probably goes back, Ralph, to the creation of nuclear weapons, the early experimentations that we all saw with generic engineering, putting human genes into pigs and doing all sorts of crazy things. There's this problem with some of our scientists that just because you can do something, they think that you should do it. There really is no end. Marc Lipsitch and Thomas Inglesby [is from] Harvard of course. And Inglesby is a prominent health security expert at Johns Hopkins. They've gone to great lengths to show there's no value; we've actually gotten zero value from these experiments. They say, "Hey, if we create these novel, brand new pandemic viruses, maybe nature will create them later and we'll have some kind of interventive strategy for them." But that makes no sense of course because nature has a million different variations that we would never be able to predict. So the idea that we can somehow predict in the laboratory and then spend tens of millions of dollars trying to find an interventive strategy when there could be millions of other combinations out there in nature, makes no sense. There is one unfortunate place where this kind of research could be useful, and that would be the creation of biological weapons.

Ralph Nader: I was going to say, Andy, and we spoke about this before, is that before Richard Nixon put an end, at least officially, to biological warfare research by the US government, Richard Nixon, the government was funding scientists in ways that would really startle people. For example, there was a page one story many years ago, before the research was officially stopped, by the *Wall Street Journal*, which described a University of Wisconsin scientist on a government contract, DoD, Department of Defense contract, working in the lab to discover a more virulent form of Dengue fever; basically to develop a more virulent form of Dengue fever. So in the biological warfare context, they do all these things. Do you think this was sort of a precursor for this scientific curiosity? And by the way, the scientists who do this do give us scientific justification. But how do you connect the two events here, the biological warfare . . .

Andrew Kimbrell: Well, first of all, you're absolutely right. Now that you mention it, I do feel compelled to mention Caspar Weinberger, who we all remember as the Secretary of Defense under Ronald Reagan. Caspar Weinberger, pretty much singlehandedly rejuvenated the entire biological weapons program in the United States, called the Biological Defense Research Program. I litigated against this about five times, because these experiments were so dangerous. He felt that since there was sort of a stand-off with nuclear weapons, why doesn't the United States get ahead on biological weapons? This happened throughout the 1980s and into the early '90s. We were successful in closing down experiments in Dugway, Utah and in Fort Detrick, Maryland, and actually ordering, through the National Environmental Policy Act, programmatic environmental impact statements on the entire program. And it was eventually shut down after the first Persian Gulf War because of their failure to come up with an anthrax vaccine. And that infuriated Senators John Glenn and Carl Levin who helped close down that program. Unfortunately, I think after 9/11, I have had I think credible information that they have revived some, but not all of those experiments. And they were incredibly dangerous and mixing all [kinds of] toxins, viruses, bacteria; you can imagine because we had a lot of discovery there that was very, very frightening. But I think again, the excuse for this kind of insanity of taking viruses and creating new novel pandemic viruses in laboratories, is because that might just happen in nature and we'd have them in a laboratory ready

to study and maybe even have a vaccine. Again, the problem with that is...let me just give you an example. So there's something called H5N1 bird flu. Most people have heard of it. Just a few hundred people have been infected by it, but it has a 60%--that's 60 percent mortality. Whoever gets it, 60% of the people die. Compare that to, for example, what's happening with COVID-19; some people say it's 1%, 4%, we'll see. But imagine 60%. Well, two researchers, Ron Fouchier who's up at the University of Erasmus in Netherlands, and Yoshihiro Kawaoka who is a researcher at University of Wisconsin, they said, "You know what, this isn't very infective, this bird flu. What if we were able to create a version that is airborne? You could get like the common cold. Let's try that." And they did. They actually were able to create this virus. So, if this virus escapes, right, 1.6 billion people could die, 60% of the world's population. Well, this caused a huge furor. In 2014, the Obama administration actually declared a moratorium on this gain of function--gain of threat. I don't like calling it gain of function because that's euphemistic; it's gain of threat research, great threat, creating novel pandemic viruses. They said, "This is just too dangerous."

Ralph Nader: Let me ask you a connected question here. They have these labs all over the world. They're in Europe, Africa, Asia, South America, North America; they're everywhere. What has been the record of the security of these labs? Because even Fort Meade in Maryland has had problems with security for this dangerous research. I mean they have to have like 100% perfection that none of this stuff will leak out of the lab. What has been the experience?

Andrew Kimbrell: Well, there's four levels of biological safety [BLS] 1, 2, 3 and 4; 4 being the strongest/1 being the weakest. You want some of these most dangerous experiments to be BLS 4, and of course I'm suggesting that we should never have this kind of experimentation at all; it should never happen! But the record is very poor. Every year we have over 100 accidents and that's just the ones that are reported. There have been deaths, quarantining, and we've had numerous accidents. And then just this October, just a month or so before we began to learn about this COVID-19, the Global Health Security Index, for the first time, did a 195-country survey and said, "Exactly how much biosecurity is out there?" Exactly the question you asked, Ralph. And their answer was, and get ready for this, that out of a score of 100 on a number of different biosecurity and safety points, out of a best possible score of 100, the average country of these 195 was 40.1 out of 100. Even the wealthier countries were 51 out of 100. Something like China that's doing a lot of these experiments, was 51st in the world. So 50 countries were more safe than that. In other countries, the BSL 4 laboratories were even worse, [such as] Israel [and the] Czech Republic. So it is abysmal that with the billions of dollars that have gone out to the biomedical research industrial complex--if you want to call it that--for all these years and all these dangerous experiments, much less these gain of threat experiments that threaten half the world's population today as we speak, because that moratorium was lifted, and in secret the NIH [National Institutes of Health] preapproved Ron Fouchier's experiments in the Netherlands [at Erasmus Medical Center] and Kawaoka's experiments in University of Wisconsin. So, airborne bird flu research is ongoing right now every day; with that, and we have a 3% out of 100 safety; that combination really should keep us up at night!

Ralph Nader: The obvious question is how come there have been catastrophes? With this kind of security and the leakage of all this lab work with virulent bacteria and virulent viruses around the world, how come there hasn't been any catastrophes?

Andrew Kimbrell: There has been catastrophes. Obviously, in the SARS virus [which] leaked twice from Beijing laboratories in China and there were deaths. But here's the point--SARS,

Marburg, and Ebola viruses are not highly transmissible. So what you do is you get two or three people to get sick and die. Sometimes they go home and their neighbors get sick and die. But these are not yet pandemic viruses, because they don't have sufficient transmissibility or they don't have sufficient infectivity, having to do with the number of human cells that they can infect. So that's why. And that's why this makes this completely different. By taking pandemic viruses by this gain of threat, so-called gain of function, but gain of threat on pandemic viruses, to make them transmissible, we no longer have a problem with laboratory workers getting ill and dying, which is terrible; we don't want that. But now we have a huge public health threat as we see with COVID-19, which I think was almost certainly created in a laboratory, certainly/probably created in a laboratory, and with the potential of something as horrific as the bird flu. With these novel techniques, these novel experiments, we are now not just having viruses that have low transmissibility, even though they have high fatality, but rather ones that can create a huge public health problem. And remember, they're novel. They're creating stuff that's never been created before through genetic engineering and animal experimentation. So our immune systems are not, like with COVID-19, we're not used to them. So now even the ones we've had before that we don't have any immunity to, that's ongoing right now. And there's obviously a few researchers around the world who are making hundreds of millions of dollars eventually on funding. And they represent a problem as far as what we need [which] is an international moratorium or ban on all gain of threat, gain of functioning, gain of threat research on potentially pandemic viruses. It's insane. Whatever value that research would provide, it can't possibly equal the threat. You know Ralph, I think the public has not been in on this debate. It has been a secret debate with the NIH and other people who funded it. I think COVID-19 is a product of this. And I know Trump wants to call it the China virus. Well, the money that went into the creation and this genetic engineering of these coronaviruses in Wuhan was supported by the NIH and the USAID. So why wouldn't it be the NIH virus or the USAID virus?

Ralph Nader: Well, because he delayed facing up to and kind of dismissing it and has bungled, we call it the Trump virus now. It may have come from China, but apart from that, let's focus on something very controversial. What's the source of the COVID-19 virus? The conventional explanation is it came from bats in live meat markets in Wuhan and the bat bit a human and then it started to spread. That's the conventional approach. Now, before we put the framework here, and before our listeners either say, "It's a conspiracy theory," or "Yes, they did come from the Wuhan Institute," contrary conclusions, I want to refer you to an article on Dr. Daniel Lucey, who is an infectious disease specialist at Georgetown University, [who] has huge experience around the world, has advised the World Health Organization and really knows his stuff in past epidemics. And he was the subject of an article by the science writer of the *New York Times* on July 14th, William Broad. And he has eight questions that he always asks scientists to ask about any kind of epidemic. He's a student of epidemics. And the paragraph that's relevant to this discussion is as follows, and I'm quoting from the *Times* article. "The sixth and seventh questions go to whether the deadly pathogen leapt to humans from a laboratory. Although some intelligence analysts and scientists have entertained that scenario, no direct evidence has come to light suggesting that the coronavirus escaped from one of Wuhan's labs. Even so, given the wet market's downgrading in the investigation, quote, these are Dr. Lucey's words, "It is important to address questions about any potential laboratory source of the virus, whether in Wuhan or elsewhere," end quote, Dr. Lucey wrote in his blog post. That's one to frame the discussion. Second, there is an article in the *Mother Jones* ["The Non-paranoid Person's Guide to Viruses Escaping from Labs"] on the virus situation. And in the article, by Rowan Jacobsen, J-A-C-O-B-S-E-N it says, and I'm quoting, "It's doubtful

we'll ever pinpoint COVID-19's origins. Despite many experts' skepticism, no one I talked to said they could confidently rule out the possibility that it accidentally escaped from a lab that was studying it. But it also could have been carried to Wuhan by someone who was infected elsewhere, or by an animal that served as an intermediate host. Yet it may turn out for the best that the Wuhan lab is now in the news. Most people don't realize how heroic some of its work was or how it could have helped to head off the next pandemic. They also haven't grasped the danger posed by the work being done at high-security biolabs around the world. Yet, the next pandemic could start from a lab in China. But it could just as easily come from our own backyard. In recent decades, more diseases have been jumping from animals to humans, a phenomenon called zoonotic spillover. Experts blame our increasing incursions into the natural world. As we convert forests to farms and hunt wild animals, we give viruses new opportunities for spillover." Now, Andrew, you are a lawyer and you're a litigator, correct?

Andrew Kimbrell: Yes.

Ralph Nader: Okay. So you know the difference between plausibility and probative evidence. Tell our listeners the difference.

Andrew Kimbrell: Well, I think that there is plausibility, [but] I would switch it to preponderance of the evidence. Quite often in civil trials you only have circumstantial evidence and some scientific evidence, but you don't have sufficient evidence to say beyond a reasonable doubt. You have to say, "Listen, this is the causative, this did it, we got it, here's the gun, here's how it happened," but you have circumstantial evidence. So you have a preponderance of the 'which is more likely.' And that's all we can do right now with this is say, "Which is more likely? Is it more likely that this chimeric virus, that some bat met a pangolin in a bar in Wuhan and with a human and somehow all that happened?" We know the wet market has been debunked. The Chinese government has debunked it; science has debunked it. So we got to get rid of these wet markets. They are horror shows; they're unethical, they hurt wildlife. We should all get together and close every wet market there is around there. It's terrible. But it didn't create COVID-19. No respectable scientist now says it did. The bat soup, bat bite theory is dead. And there is no other tangible theory. How did one animal get simultaneously infected by two or three other animals that had the unique capacity that COVID-19 has? And there's a very important article by Nikolai Petrovsky, one of the most highly respected vaccine scientists in the world. In late May it came out [*Science Times*]. He and his team in Australia had done a comprehensive surveys saying they looked at all the animals they could find and there wasn't a single animal out there that could serve as the reservoir for this. And as he said, this virus was exquisitely designed to be infective to humans and completely unlike any virus they had known.

Ralph Nader: First of all, just to clarify for our listeners, you're saying there's a preponderance of the evidence that it accidentally was leaked from the lab. You're not saying deliberate, right?

Andrew Kimbrell: No. No. I don't think it was deliberately released. And by the way, for the folks out there, I really get it that we all need to be worried about biological weapons research. We know it's going on in China. We know it's still going on in the US, and almost certainly going on in Russia. So I don't want to give--anymore that I want to give the wet markets a pass--I don't want to give biological weapons research a pass. It's a huge danger, a bio-security danger to us as well. However, it is highly, probably unlikely that this would . . . that COVID-19 would ever be a bio weapon [because] it would boomerang. It's highly infectious in humans. It would boomerang on your own population; it would make no sense. So, yes, accidental release, not deliberate release, a

product of genetic engineering that took a SARS-like virus; they wanted to see how transmissible they could make it; they wanted to see how lethal they could make it, and it escaped.

Ralph Nader: I have to question your no respectable science, because I've heard on the radio and read in the media where there are scientists who say it came from animals. And the fact is there was a very respectable scientist in Wuhan who completely dismissed the leak from the lab and said it was zoonotically or sourced in animal transmission. That doesn't mean that's the case, Andy. It just . . .

Andrew Kimbrell: No. But Ralph, no, I said that the wet market hypothesis, the one you mentioned, the one that was popular in the media, has been completely debunked. They still say it could have been natural, some other animals could have done it, but there is no real scenario for that. But here is what I want to point out. I don't want to get lost in this discussion, because this is where everyone gets lost and it defeats the purpose of why I'm on your show today, which is I'm not concerned with proving one thing or the other. Shi Zhengli, who is the bat woman, who is director of the Wuhan Institute of Virology's [Center for Emerging Infectious Diseases], said when she heard and saw the virus going out there and she saw the pandemic, she didn't sleep a wink for days she was so afraid. This is her saying, "I didn't sleep a wink for days." She said, "I was afraid that that virus had come from my lab." So we don't need a lot of people saying what's possible. I said Petrovsky, and you mentioned Lacey. Jonathan Latham has an excellent article on this. I recommend everyone read the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists [*Bulletin* publication] on June 4th with Milton Leitenberg's excellent and very well-researched analysis so you can make your own decision about whether you think it was lab or natural. The most important thing is that the woman who actually was the head of that gain of threat research, funded by the NIH for five years, said she was so afraid she couldn't sleep a wink, Ralph.

Ralph Nader: You say she couldn't sleep at night, but what is her position right now?

Andrew Kimbrell: Her position is she looked through all of her viruses and she said this was not one of them. Now, of course we don't have those records. And maybe she's right and maybe she's wrong. But the point I'm trying to make here is that it could have happened. If this gain of research could have been a cause, there's a reasonable belief that it could have been a cause and there are scientists across the board. You mentioned several and I mentioned several, including her who said that she was so afraid that her research had caused it that she couldn't sleep. That's all I care about. That means that this research is admittedly something that could create the next pandemic. This is this gain of threat research, [could] create new pandemic viruses. Fouchier is doing the Netherlands with NIH money. Kawaoka is doing in University of Wisconsin [and] there are many, many other scientists including Shi Zhengli in China who are still doing it. That means they agree that this could be the source of a new pandemic that could be even worse than we're seeing now. That's the only answer we need is . . .

Ralph Nader: What's the suggestion for further investigations--where, who?

Andrew Kimbrell: You don't need further investigation, unless you want to try and prove it one way or the other. And China probably will never release any records from that laboratory they have. And China has actively destroyed a huge amount of evidence that is in the public record. I'm saying what we need now is to say research on vaccines, great, go for it; viral research, go for it. Lots of research is really important. But we need to reinstate the 2014 Obama moratorium on this gain of threat research, potential pandemic viruses. It represents an existential threat to the human

population. It's providing little or zero help in any vaccine. And again, I rely on Marc Lipsitch and Tom Inglesby and Richard Ebright, the top scientists in the field who have said exactly what I'm saying. And Marc Lipsitch, at Harvard, epidemiology specialist at Harvard, has said for every year that they work on one of these pandemic viruses with this gain of threat engineering animal research, there's a 1 in 1000 chance of an accidental escape from the lab. This has not been part of the public debate. We've debated nuclear weapons; we've debated other GMOs. But we have not said we need a moratorium at least, multi-multiyear moratorium, hopefully a ban, on genetically engineering these viruses--these potential pandemic viruses where they're providing us almost no medical. So that's the key that we need to focus on rather than back and forth, or using it as anti-China or Trump. That's the hidden . . . that's the forest that we need to look at and not get so obsessed with the trees.

Ralph Nader: Fair enough, but the support for what you're recommending, a moratorium, will be much greater if there are any whistleblowers that provide documented evidence out of the Wuhan Institute. Then it becomes really a high-level visible change and moratorium. So do you see any possibility of that?

Andrew Kimbrell: Yeah, the case is building. I mean that's what Jonathan Latham's article says and what Petrovsky is saying--the case is building. But I will just point out before that hundreds of scientists came together in 2014 to get this moratorium done. It's really unusual to have a moratorium on research and science. And they got it done in 2014 because of the fear of this bird flu research that was being done that could lead to this fantastic, horrifying pandemic of 1.6 billion people dying. Well, that's still out there. And so I find it a little shocking that these experiments were approved in secret a little over a year ago, reapproved after they lifted the moratorium, and that there's no public debate about that.

Ralph Nader: Does Trump know about this?

Andrew Kimbrell: I have no idea what he -.

Ralph Nader: Because it's under his . . .

Andrew Kimbrell: His capacity to take in information seems to me extremely limited since he doesn't read and . . .

Ralph Nader: Let's put it this way. Since it was under his regime that this occurred, the reintroduction of this kind of research, does the White House know about this?

Andrew Kimbrell: Well, Fauci and Francis Collins were supportive of this kind of research. They were not obviously in favor of the moratorium. So, there was enough scientific angst about what was going on. But again, I think that we argue . . . we see these nuclear treaties going down the drain and these are really existential threats to us. But we don't think of this genetic engineering of these pandemic viruses that are ongoing in these labs as threats, especially since there has been this total failure to have a strong biosecurity international effort. This is something we got to get our work together on. I'm certainly going to be working on it. We're going to Congress to try and get bipartisan agreement to get a moratorium or a ban on this kind of research in COVID because we don't have to prove that it didn't create it, we just have to show, as so many scientists have, that it is either probable or even just possible. That is enough. The Nuremberg Code said very explicitly that you should never do research whose threat to the public is greater than the advantage that you're getting. And this seems to me clearly an example of that. Additionally, there's a similar

code in the InterAcademy Partnership [a global network] and I'm going to read it to you. This is the code that's supposed to be the ethics behind all biomedical research. And it says, "Scientists have an obligation to do no harm. They need to take into consideration the reasonably foreseeable consequences of their own activities." Well, this kind of research obviously violates that. It's just a small sector of the research that's going on and it's fairly new because of the new technologies in synthetic virology and genetic engineering. But it represents an existential threat.

Ralph Nader: What you're saying in legal terms is the burden of proof is on the scientists; it's not on the people who fear the consequences of it or on the potential victims. It's on the scientists and those in Congress and elsewhere who fund them. Let me quote your statement recently. This is Andrew Kimbrell: "Unfortunately, many powerful forces at the NIH, World Health Organization, et cetera, have for self-interested reasons, including hundreds of millions in potential funding, continue to downplay the role of this profoundly hazardous research in the current pandemic and its dangers in creating future pandemics." You're referring to the hazardous research where? And what are the self-interested reasons?

Andrew Kimbrell: Well, there are researchers who want to do this research and they're doing them. I mentioned several by name. I don't know what it feels like to come home at dinner and say, "Hey, honey, I just created a novel pandemic bird flu that could kill 1.6 billion people if it got out of my laboratory." I can't think you could possibly explain that to yourself. It's done no good. Hasn't helped anybody. The same with the research that Shi Zhengli was doing in the Wuhan Institute of Virology. It hasn't with a vaccine. It hasn't helped us with any coronaviruses. All it did was create the potential and the possible - some of us think probable - pandemic that we're facing. And we know that this kind of research is going on around the world and I think some of it's probably being secretly done for biological weapons research. So we need to expose this. The genetic engineering movement has been very strong around the world. We've seen the dangers of genetic engineering bacteria and crops. We know the threats of trying to genetically engineer humans. We need to add to that, as part of our movement, to say the genetic engineering of these pandemic viruses--to make them more threatening by scientists who can do it but shouldn't do it--needs to be stopped, just like some of this other research. On an existential basis, it actually is even more threatening to the human population than other forms of genetic engineering.

Ralph Nader: Two questions. Why hasn't Congress had a congressional hearing on this in the House or Senate since it's been going on a long time and since Obama put a moratorium on it in 2014? You'd think the Democrats in the House would be interested in it and the science and technology committee. And second, should there be an international treaty movement getting underway fast? Let's start with Congress.

Andrew Kimbrell: Yeah. I think there were . . . and again, I really want to give credit to . . . they haven't been speaking out lately and I'm sorry they haven't, but the Cambridge Working Group did a great job. It's a group of scientists who got this moratorium done. Again I'll mention Marc Lipsitch of Harvard, and Tom Inglesby at Johns Hopkins, great scientists. We need them again. We need more hearings. We had them then early, but that's six, seven years ago. We need them now urgently, because US funding is a huge source in this. I will note that the number two funder of the World Health Organization [WHO] after the United States is the Gates Foundation; not a country. The second greatest funding of the world happens to be with the Gates Foundation. We need people like at the Gates Foundation, we need these other countries to say, "You know what,

we also are not going to support this particular jagged edge research, very, very, very dangerous, shouldn't be doing it."

And yeah, if you look at the Global Health Security Index released in October, they have a series of suggestions, which are very important recommendations that, yes, include United Nations' overview of this, international treaties. And it reminds me at the beginning when we started looking at nuclear fission--when we looked at that kind of a level of danger to the world--we didn't do so well back then. Maybe we can do better now and get this research that is only about 10 or 11 years old, but one can say, no, we're not going to do this; this is way too dangerous. We as a human population, as an international community, as an international research community, are going to say no to that small little viral research industrial complex, which is really small but very powerful. Just say no!

Ralph Nader: Andy, there seems to be a massive indifference here that requires a civic jolt. And you're a well-known activist; you've worked with legislatures; you've worked with initiatives on the ballot; you've litigated and won a lot of cases especially in the Ninth Circuit against Monsanto and others. Tell us exactly what action your organizations are taking. And are you going to write a letter to Bill Gates? So exactly what actions so people can attach themselves to it and support them.

Andrew Kimbrell: Yeah. Thank you, Ralph. Yes, I think we are going to specifically launch a major campaign among scientists. This is the National Center for Technology Assessment, and I'm sure we'll get many other groups with us that were supporting the first moratorium. The first thing we want to do is we want to get the moratorium back. We want to say, lifting it during the Trump Administration was wrong; getting that moratorium done in the Obama administration was the right thing to do. We need to make it a little bit more extensive. We need to make sure it's more carefully monitored than it was, but still, it's not like we're starting from scratch. We did it right and then it got lifted during the Trump administration. We don't want to do that; we want to reassert it. We may have bipartisan support from Democrats and Republicans. So we can go to Congress, and we think that's going to be more effective. There is possible litigation under the National Environmental Policy Act. We're looking at that as well. And we want to look to some of our international partners that we've already reached out to and said, can we get some support, for example, from our friends at the European Union who are part of the GMO movement, which is a huge movement, as you know, around the world; and see if we can get them to understand how also banning genetic engineering of viruses fits in with the larger problems of dealing with the regulation and the moratoriums on genetic engineering.

The idea is to first start in this country. Because US funding is so important to all of these things, let's get that moratorium back on track here. Let's work in Congress. Let's work at the regulatory area but also let's take it a little bit to litigation as well. Then we need to look at the international and hopefully folks at the Global Health Security Index and others who have recommended the United Nations take an active role in this for an international treaty. We also need to look back to the 1972 biological warfare convention, don't we, Ralph? We need to make sure that that's being enforced because it won't help us all that much to get rid of the medical part of this research if it's still ongoing in the biological warfare research.

Ralph Nader: Well, to frame all this, what about an open letter by your organization, signed by other coalition groups, to Donald Trump and the leadership in the House and Senate from both parties? Comprehensive letter.

Andrew Kimbrell: Yeah, I think that's what we're going to need and we're going to need some prominent scientists [to sign] onto that letter. And I think that we need to move the debate about tit-for-tat, China versus anything else and trying to weaponize this discussion for political gains, whose purpose is, whether be it Trump or anyone else, and get to the real nub of it, which is that we can't stop natural pandemics from happening in nature; that's going to happen. But we can stop pandemics that originated in the laboratories around the world because people are deliberately creating them in those laboratories. There's no...

Ralph Nader: So on the open letter, to frame it for the media and for the citizenry, are you all for it? Can you do it?

Andrew Kimbrell: Yeah, absolutely.

Ralph Nader: Okay. Then we will look forward to it.

Andrew Kimbrell: I need you to -

Ralph Nader: We'll get people to sign it and all these scientists you referenced, shouldn't have any trouble signing it, because that's the only way you're going to get high-level visibility to something that is often not public [but] proprietary, secret, you name it. When do you think you can get this done, Andy?

Andrew Kimbrell: I'm looking to this summer to really get this campaign on the road and to get scientists lined up. I've already communicated with dozens of scientists. So we're going to put this together. There are some language issues. You want to make sure that the moratorium is correctly worded. We've got some good lawyers and good scientists working on that. So, yeah, we're going to be watching this this summer, folks, so stay tuned.

Ralph Nader: And how can people get more information about your organization? What's your website?

Andrew Kimbrell: Yeah. They can get more information through the [www.icta](http://www.icta.org), International Center for Technology Assessment, dot org. And there'll be more and more information on that website as this campaign really takes off this summer.

Ralph Nader: Okay. Steve, David, any concluding questions?

Steve Skrovan: Yeah. Andrew, how does a virus escape from a lab?

Andrew Kimbrell: There's numerous ways. It can escape because somebody didn't correctly wash their hands, didn't dispose of their clothing appropriately. It can escape through an animal that's been infected and not properly disposed of. It can escape through one lab sending the virus to another lab under the mistaken view that that virus has been killed or is disabled and it hasn't been. This happens a lot actually. It's one of the major ways . . . we did it with anthrax. CDC sent out a whole bunch of anthrax to about 100 labs around the world saying we killed this bacteria, don't worry about it, and then turns out it wasn't. So accidents can happen between lab transportation as well. But people have a bad day; people are not paying attention; people are ill, or an animal is not properly disposed of; the viruses sent in an unsafe manner to another laboratory. There are a number of vectors that can make that happen.

Steve Skrovan: So they're working on this theoretically as something with good intentions; they're working on this to try to get to the bottom of how you get a vaccine for a SARS coronavirus, and . . .

Andrew Kimbrell: No, this is not vaccine research. Vaccine research, you try and kill or make a vaccine less virulent in order to use it for vaccine. This is specifically to make that virus more virulent, to make that virus more transmissible and more infective. And the only reason they have for doing this outside of biological weapons research is to say maybe this could happen out in nature, this combination we just did in the lab. And if it does, [we could] be ready for it. That's pretty much it; that's their rationale.

Steve Skrovan: Okay.

Ralph Nader: Well, very good. We're out of time, Andy. And I'm sure our listeners will send some questions in. This is a calm discussion; it's not going in one direction after another. And we clearly have to understand that even if we do everything right in the US, there are other countries that have maybe secret biological warfare research [or] have even worse lab security. So we've got to come together as a planet here with international treaty. There are international treaties on weapons of mass destruction, as a precedent to go to work on this. So we look forward to your open, comprehensive letter to Trump and the leadership on both sides in the House and Senate to get them involved and get them on top of it. They did it once in 2014; they can do it again.

Andrew Kimbrell: And Ralph, I think that the point you make is so important that if these technologies develop, and we're talking about synthetic biology, synthetic virology. The technology develops but our capacity as a world community, as an Earth community to deal with it has not caught up with that technology. So it's a calm conversation, but for me inwardly not so calm. A little like Shi Zhengli, it's hard to sleep sometimes knowing that these technologies could go any further in creating these essential threats similar to nuclear and other genetic engineering. And as a global community, we really do, and maybe COVID-19 is a wake-up call, I hope it is, and that we can say, we can no longer approach this just nationally. We cannot approach it as a political football or weaponizing it on cable TV shows. That's nonsense. This is far too serious for that; it's far too important. We're looking towards the future and future generations and health, security and safety that we deal with issues now and we deal with them comprehensively.

Ralph Nader: That's what I meant by calm. You can have a calm discussion and be very super urgent, which is what this whole interview is all about. Thank you very much. We've been talking with Andrew Kimbrell, who is, among other things, a founder of the Center for Food Safety as well as director of the International Center for Technology Assessment. To be continued. We look forward to your comprehensive letter, and all kinds of groups, I'm sure, will want to join in. There's no time to lose here.

Andrew Kimbrell: No, no. Appreciate it, Ralph. As always, thanks for having me on. Stay healthy and safe, everybody, okay? To be continued.

Ralph Nader: Yeah. You're welcome.

Andrew Kimbrell: Thanks, guys. Thanks, Dave. Thanks, everybody.

Steve Skrovan: As Ralph said, we've been speaking with Andrew Kimbrell, the director of the Center for Food Safety. We will link to his work at ralphnaderradiohour.com. Let's take a short

break. When we return, we will talk about why Trump and Pence should step down and let actual public health experts get us through this crisis. Talk about a novel idea. But first, let's check in with our corporate crime reporter, Russell Mokhiber.

Russell Mokhiber: From the National Press Building in Washington, D.C., this is your Corporate Crime Reporter Morning Minute for Thursday, July 9, 2020. I'm Russell Mokhiber.

Eula Bingham, the head of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration from 1977 to 1981, has died. When she took over the agency, OSHA, she said, had made itself the butt of jokes in every newspaper and magazine in this country. During her nearly four years running the agency, Dr. Bingham repaired OSHA's reputation by eliminating nit-picking rules and focusing on critical health and safety risks. She also began ultimately successful campaigns, establishing worker rights to know about their exposure to hazardous substances. That's according to a report in the *Wall Street Journal*. "Workers have a right to expect they won't be killed on their jobs," Dr. Bingham told the *Washington Post* a few months after President Carter appointed her as the first woman to head OSHA. 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. So far during this crisis, our president has refused to wear a face mask and he mocked Joe Biden for wearing a mask. It's amazing how this simple act of wearing a small piece of fabric on your face saves lives. And this is my own opinion, it also illustrates what a terrible businessman he is, because his campaign could have made a fortune on Make America Great Again masks. But that aside, a recent model estimates that if in the United States, at least 95% of people wear face masks in public between June and October, about 33,000 deaths can be avoided. And last week, in a complete 180, President Trump finally wore a mask and he said, quote, "I have never been against masks, but I do believe they have a time and a place." By the way, that's a terrible Donald Trump impression, but that's all I could do. Definitely a step in the right direction but too late and still not enough. Our next guest has some strong opinions about all of that. David?

David Feldman: Dr. Michael Carome is the director of the Health Research Group at Public Citizen, which is a nonprofit consumer advocacy organization standing up to corporate power and holds the government accountable. Dr. Carome is an expert on issues of drug and medical device safety, pharmacy compounding, [U.S.] Food and Drug Administration [FDA] oversight, healthcare policy, and the protection of human research subjects. Welcome to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*, Dr. Michael Carome.

Michael Carome: Thank you for having me.

Ralph Nader: Thank you, Michael. I have to tell our listeners I have been a long-time advocate of letting professional pandemic specialists and managers run the nation's policy in response to COVID-19. Other countries have done this. Other countries' prime ministers have stepped aside and let experts run it. That's occurred in Canada's British Columbia, most prominently in North America, very successful, as well as in places like Taiwan, New Zealand and Uruguay. And even what is considered an undeveloped country, Rwanda, has produced much better results, as you might expect. And now we're seeing a surge in 48 states of COVID-19 cases, and a surge in the fatalities. And Public Citizen's Health Research Group is leading a coalition drive to send the message to Donald Trump and Mike Pence, "Please step aside, stop the bungling, and let

professionals take control." Can you elaborate this letter, Michael, and give your reasons? And tell us how successful the size of the coalition is becoming.

Michael Carome: Sure. So I think it should be obvious to everyone that what's happening across this country is absolutely horrifying. We are seeing just this tremendous surge in the number of daily confirmed cases of coronavirus infections. We had been holding steady at around 20,000 a day two months ago, and in the last four weeks, we have surged well above 60,000 cases a day. And following the rise in the number of cases, we've seen the number of deaths rise. And if things aren't reversed quickly, they're going to get extremely worse. Unlike other countries, as you noted, we are not allowing federal experts in public health and medicine to lead the response. In fact, not only are we not letting them lead the response, we have our leaders, Trump and Pence and others, systematically undermining the efforts of our experts to bring the pandemic under control. And so for that reason, there's a clear need for Trump and Pence to step aside and turn over the reins of control of the federal response to the pandemic immediately. And if that doesn't happen soon, things which are bordering on catastrophic will become catastrophic. So to communicate that point to the White House, we gathered together a coalition of approximately 20 organizations that have interest in public health, worker safety, civil rights and other areas, and we sent that letter on July 14th to the White House and urged President Trump and Vice President Pence to step aside in the response, and to give full operational control over the pandemic response to the experts within the US Public Health Service.

Ralph Nader: Have you had a response yet?

Michael Carome: We have not heard anything from the White House and if you've listened to the things that Trump continues to say publicly in press briefings, he continues to ignore basically the coronavirus pandemic and downplay its seriousness. He attributes the rising number of cases to the fact we're simply doing more testing. But that ignores the fact that hospitals in multiple states are being overwhelmed with seriously-ill patients. Hospitals have reached capacity in terms of the number of intensive care unit or ICU beds. Hospital workers don't have sufficient protective gear to protect themselves from exposure to the coronavirus when caring for these patients. And so in every aspect, the pandemic is going in the wrong direction. Trump and Pence give rosy assessments that are deceiving the American public and the raging fire of the pandemic continues to burn.

Ralph Nader: It's the worst of all scenarios for the White House. Not only didn't they do enough in January and February when they were warned about it to prevent it and minimize it when it came from China, but everything they have done almost in the last few months has been to make it worse. They've undermined the scientists; they've proposed dangerous drugs; they have not coordinated with the states to provide adequate facilities [and] supplies. Almost everything they've done has aided and abetted this virus. And unlike most countries in the world, this virus is coming back much earlier than the scientists even predicted. They thought it would come back in the late fall and early winter, and now it's coming back in the mid-summer. So what I want to do is ask you to tell our listeners, Dr. Carome, how they can access this letter and download it and distribute it to their friends and relatives and coworkers, and then turn around and if they so agree, call the White House opinion Switchboard--we'll give you the number in a minute--and let the White House know that this is a booming grassroot movement out of the fear that this virus is going to shut down the economy even more than it has, take hundreds of thousands of lives and disrupt our country in ways never seen since its founding. What's the website?

Michael Carome: So the letter is posted on Public Citizen's web. If you go to www.citizen.org and just search for Trump coronavirus letter, you should find the letter that we sent on July 14th. It's a very short letter that summarizes each of the aspects of the Trump response that have undermined and fueled the pandemic. And people can use that to craft their messaging to the White House. It's a very straightforward message--step aside; here are all the things you've done wrong. And this is just an urgent matter that demands their immediate attention.

Ralph Nader: Michael, I'm curious, enlighten me. Why hasn't the American Medical Association [AMA], and the other medical associations [such as] the American Public Health Association, weeks ago, come out forcefully, prominently through the media--since they are too powerful to be ignored--and demanded that Trump and Pence step aside and let professional pandemic scientists and managers take the reins?

Michael Carome: No, I think some medical societies and some organizations have tried to defend the federal experts in public health and medicine and encouraged the administration to listen and not muzzle those experts. But I think the reason they don't want to be more forceful is I think they're just afraid to stand up to Trump and worry about the pushback that they might get from the way he trolls everyone who speaks out against him.

Ralph Nader: Are they supporting your letter though, now that you've taken the lead, Public Citizen's Health Research Group?

Michael Carome: We haven't had major groups like that who have joined the letter, unfortunately.

Ralph Nader: This is a historic dereliction of duty in my judgment. This is absolutely historic. What are they afraid of, that he'll throw a tweet or two at them? They don't have that kind of vulnerability to his madness. They have an overriding duty to save the lives of the American people through their expertise and their far-flung membership at health facilities all over the country. Can you suggest how you can get these people to turn around, who head these organizations?

Michael Carome: I think we present them with the facts and the facts are obvious. I would think they would support what we're seeking here.

Ralph Nader: It's massive assault on the health and safety of all Americans regardless of the political labels they put on themselves, and we've all got to pull together and just flood that White House Switchboard, which we're going to give you right now. After you get this letter from Health Research Group, go to citizen.org and go to the Trump coronavirus letter. And you'll find that, you'll be equipped to inform the operators who answer the White House Switchboard opinion office why you're calling. And don't think they don't tabulate. And don't think they won't listen when you say, "I'm a Republican and I voted for Trump but enough is enough. Step aside."

Steve Skrovan: And do we have that number, Ralph?

Ralph Nader: Here are the numbers, listeners, to call. The comment number, and they total up the comments, and tell them if you're a Trump voter or a conservative, that will make your call even more penetrating. The number is 202-456-1111. That's 202-456-1111. And the Switchboard number for the White House is 202-456-1414. 202-456-1414. Please do your duty, listeners. And thank you very much, Michael. Thanks to the Public Citizen Health Research Group for all its

great work over the years. And to be continued. Unfortunately, this pandemic will not go away soon.

Michael Carome: Thank you for having me.

Steve Skrovan: We have been speaking with the director of Public Citizen's Health Research Group, Dr. Michael Carome. We will link to his work at ralphnaderradiohour.com. I want to thank our guests again, Andrew Kimbrell and Dr. Michael Carome. For those of you listening on the radio, that's our show. For you podcast listeners, stay tuned for some bonus material we call "The Wrap Up". A transcript of this show will appear on the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour* website soon after the episode is posted.

Dave Feldman: Join us next week on the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour* when we welcome back advertising guru, Bill Hillsman. Thank you, Ralph.

Ralph Nader: Thank you, everybody. And the rumble from the people worked on Nixon. Send Trump a rumble from the people.

[Music]

Well, you've been sitting way too long.

Oh, step up.

You know what's right and you know what's wrong.

Rise up.

Don't let the system pull you down.

Stand up.

Oh, stand up.

Oh, you've been sitting way too long.

You say you're tired of trying.

You say you have no choice.

You say you're just one person.

And who will hear your voice.