

## RALPH NADER RADIO HOUR EP 379 TRANSCRIPT

**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:** Good morning.

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

**Ralph Nader:** Hello, everybody.

**Steve Skrovan:** We have infinite information at our fingertips every time we go online, but the quality integrity of that information varies widely. And finding trustworthy info among the trillions of irrelevant and misleading blog posts and news reports requires luck or a very particular set of skills. As Liam Neeson would say, “News literacy is that ability to identify what news and other content is worth trusting, sharing, and acting on.” And it's critical if we want to make informed choices about the products we consume, the organizations we support, and the politicians we elect. When our social media feeds are overflowing with disinformation and the news sources we've trusted are packed with corporate-sponsored editorials, how can we empower ourselves as consumers and citizens? That's one of the questions we'll put to today's guest, Alan Miller. He spent decades working as an investigative reporter, then founded the News Literacy Project, a non-partisan, nonprofit that's working to arm the public with the skills we all need to separate the truth from the chatter. Then in the second half the show, Ralph will answer more of your listener questions, and as always, somewhere in between we'll check in with our Corporate Crime Reporter, Russell Mokhiber. But first, when it comes to consuming news, how do we sift the facts from the fiction in the digital age. David?

**David Feldman:** Alan Miller is a Pulitzer Prize-Winning investigative reporter and the founder and CEO of the News Literacy Project. Welcome to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*, Alan Miller.

**Alan C. Miller:** Thank you for having me.

**Ralph Nader:** Welcome indeed, Alan. And we want to give you a chance to go into real detail about how people can connect with all the various offerings in this nonprofit effort that you're making available to them. But let's start with the most entrenched form of deception, which is corporate advertising. I always said that Trump learned his deceptive habits from his business career. What would you say to someone who claims that this 24-hour humdrum of commercial advertisement, which at the minimum is puffing, and at the maximum is just downright deceptive and lying, for example, as to what over-the-counter medicines do and not having any evidence for it, or the old tobacco ads that supposed to make you feel good and be more productive, and it's just going on now on radio, TV, and in newspapers and magazines. Let's have your observation on that, and does your group touch on that at all?

**Alan C. Miller:** So people are besieged by news and information of varying stripes and on credibility and accountability, and obviously a significant part of that is the advertising you're talking about. And the information landscape is particularly fraught because people get so much of their information online, and even the news and the most credible information comes in a disaggregated form. And increasingly there's a great deal of information that is created

to look like news and look like it's credible, I mean, including advertising, branded content, misinformation, [and] disinformation, which really makes it critical that consumers have the critical thinking skills to be able to discern what they should trust, what they should share, and what they should act on. And we have a...one of our primary resources is a virtual classroom we call Checkology, which is a cutting-edge online platform with real-world lessons. And to go to your question, in this foundational lesson called InfoZones, we teach people to understand the difference between news, opinion, advertising, propaganda, and more information based on its primary purpose, so that they can make those distinctions about what they're looking at and ask who created it and for what purpose and how should I respond to it.

**Ralph Nader:** So, how do you distinguish in your offerings between two categories-- adults, and middle and high school students? I'm intrigued by your more and more successful attempt to have teachers begin teaching, which in the old days we would say, how to detect propaganda?

**Alan C. Miller:** So you're right that we are now looking to combat this existential challenge of misinformation on multiple fronts. For the first decade we were focused on equipping educators to teach their students how to know what's news and information to trust, and that's still our primary mission at this point. And we're working with educators in every state throughout the country to do that, and we've had an increasing pick up of our virtual classroom and our weekly newsletter and other resources we provide. But we realized about a year and a half ago that the existential challenge to democracy was really...is really a crisis. And certainly the events of the last year between the pandemic and the election and post-election underscore that. And so we decided to create a group of resources for the general public as well, and that includes: a version of Checkology, the virtual classroom, which is available Checkology.org, a version of our newsletter, which we call *Get Smart about News* for the public that debunks the most recent conspiracy theories, viral rumors, and hoaxes. We have an app called Informable, which is a game that tests and builds news literacy skills for all ages. And last year we also started a podcast called *Is That A Fact?* that looks at the role of misinformation and democracy.

**Ralph Nader:** Now, just to back up a bit. Give us an idea of the size of your organization, who funds it, how many staff you have, because our experience in reaching out to social studies teachers, and so on is very labor-intensive.

**Alan C. Miller:** So, let me start with the last point you made. You're absolutely right, we don't have a national education system. We have fifty – essentially - systems, one in every state. And we are working, not just with social studies teachers, but with English and government, humanities, and journalism teachers as well. So, in terms of the organization, we have grown a good deal recently. Our budget is approximately 5 million dollars, and we have a staff of 28, which works virtually spread across 10 states and Canada. You asked about funding; we have a diverse set of funders. Our largest, well, we've got foundation funding, some corporate funding, individual funding, and then we get some revenue from earned income. We are an independent, nonpartisan organization, so our funders have no impact in terms of our programs or our content.

**Ralph Nader:** All right. So here's the real dilemma from an outsider's look at what you're doing. You can demonstrate beyond a reasonable doubt that X is false and Y is true on the same subject, but what happens if a good part of your audience doesn't want to know that X

is false and Y is true, and will support Trump's thousands of misleading and outright false statements regardless of how many times Glenn Kessler and others get to them on the facts, and regardless of what they even know of the facts? I've met Trump people who support Trump saying lies and then when you meet them later Trump is not even discussed. You discuss his friends and people you meet in stores; they actually have the truth. They know what the truth is. They believe in the truth, but when it comes to Trump they suddenly switch gears. What's your observation on people's motivation to want to find what is factual, what is truth, what is evidence?

**Alan C. Miller:** So I think, first of all, I would say you just made a good case for why it's...why we decided to start in schools and continue to focus a lot of our effort there. It is so important that we reach the next generation when they're forming habits of mind and consumption habits that will last a lifetime, and before they get locked in to their filter bubbles, which have become really more like filtered prisons for many, and only look for information that will not so much inform them, but to confirm their pre-existing beliefs. We teach about bias; we have a lesson on that; it's a key part of what we do. We also teach about confirmation bias, so that people understand what they're bringing to what they're looking at and how they're evaluating it. We also have a lesson on the role of algorithms to personalize information, because as we know, the algorithms tend to reinforce pre-existing views and encourage people to get information from sources that they're likely to agree with. I think that it is a great challenge to reach the general public. It's something we're putting more and more focus on for people who are willing to learn to be more mindful about what it is that they're consuming and doing with it. We also have a list of conspiratorial thinking to help people understand what it is, why it's so appealing, how to avoid going down those rabbit holes and to push back for those who have.

**Ralph Nader:** What kind of pushback are you getting by certain teachers or some school administrators?

**Alan C. Miller:** We...as I mentioned, we are rigorously nonpartisan. We don't tell people what to think. We don't recommend specific sources or steer people away from them. We're giving them the tools to know *how* to think. So, I'm proud to say that we are in schools in all 50 states; we're working with the largest school districts in New York, and LA, and Chicago, but also with districts in South Carolina, and Missouri, and Alabama, and Texas. And we have found really good uptake on the platform and our other resources. We haven't gotten a lot of pushback. Occasionally, we've heard from teachers that they are either concerned or they may have heard from parents, so we've prepared some materials for them to share with parents to explain what they're doing in their classrooms and how they can respond.

**Ralph Nader:** How do you deal with very contemporary touchy issues that are filtering through the schools now, especially in Texas? The Texas politicians are engaged in regulating what can be learned and not learned in school about slavery, systemic racism, Jim Crow laws. How do you avoid a collision with that, or do you face it head-on? And I could give other examples, and so could you, that are in the press these days.

**Alan C. Miller:** So in our virtual classroom, we deal with contemporary issues. We use them as examples in the media and we do it in a way that is nonpartisan, that is dedicated to understanding what's credible, and to help educators navigate this fraud environment when they're teaching about civics, and government, and issues relating to the truth. We also...we have a newsletter which for educators we call *The Sift* [and] for the general public *Get Smart*

*about News*. And that's where we deal with the latest viral rumors, and conspiracy theories, and hoaxes, and we essentially debunk them and explain why they're not true or not to be believed and provide links and discussion prompts to turn them into timely lessons.

**Ralph Nader:** Now, you mentioned you're nonpartisan; let's examine that. Number one, how do you deal with the yeoman work by Glenn Kessler in *the Washington Post* to tabulate ~~it~~ over 30,000 misleading statements and lies by Trump? Do you use that database?

**Alan C. Miller:** Well, we will refer to, and sometimes, particularly in the newsletters, we will quote the fact checkers who are not just Kessler but Politifact and factcheck.org, that are independent, that are transparent, and that are not just telling people to believe or not believe certain things, but basically providing the basis upon which they're making those determinations. So we think they play an important role here in pushing back against misinformation.

**Ralph Nader:** Well, let's examine two real puzzles I'm sure that have occurred to you. We're talking with Alan C. Miller, a Pulitzer prize-winning journalist for many years who in 2008 founded the News Literacy Project and he's still running it. It's a national education nonprofit that works with educators and journalists to offer resources and tools to help middle school and high school students learn to separate fact from fiction. All right, we have two situations where, let's say a year or two ago, that is UFOs and the Wuhan lab potential leak. Now, a year or two ago anybody who spoke about UFOs would be considered rather starry-eyed, to put it mildly, and anybody who mentioned that the coronavirus COVID-19 could have come from a leak from the Wuhan Institute Lab, which is contractually working with the National Institutes of Health, including gaining a function research on viruses, they would be considered a conspiracy theorists. Well now, as you can see in just the last few days, more and more scientists have agreed that this is a possibility with the Wuhan lab and needs much further investigation and not automatic reflection of the Chinese government's position, which is that it didn't come from the Wuhan lab. And now, I mean, the papers are full of UFO is not such a crazy deal anymore. Both Republicans and Democrats think that something was out there periodically and we can't just dismiss it and that included Barack Obama's comment. How do you deal with a shift like that when you've got...you've perhaps have been on the record one way two, three years ago, but now you have to, shall we say, correct yourself into a stage of healthy skepticism that people should have, not just saying it's conspiracy theories?

**Alan C. Miller:** So I think you just touched on the key term here which is healthy skepticism, and I think the two cases you just mentioned are really great examples of what we call teachable moments, and they have a tremendous amount of news literacy lessons built into them. We encourage people to be skeptical. We encourage them to get a wide variety of sources of information, not just to go to one source or sources they're likely to believe. And we encourage them to follow a story or news over time because truth is often provisional and it takes time for it to emerge. And I think the Wuhan lab case is just a great example where you can unpack the fact that they've never known. I mean, the scientists, the government have never known definitively where the coronavirus initially emerged. And there was a rush to dismiss the lab as a theory and there's been a lot of discussion about the reasons that may have been, including a certain amount of sort of groupthink and an effort to dismiss those who were...who thought that was a possibility because there were voices out there. Some trusted sources who were dismissive like the World Health Organization and there may have well been a partisan piece to this because of who was proposing that as a more likely scenario. And then there was the rush as you said, to not only downplay it but actually to call it a

conspiracy theory. And I think that in this environment where there is so much conspiratorial thinking, I think we have to be very careful about what we categorize in that way. And on the UFOs it's somewhat similar but now obviously there is more evidence and people need to take a look at that as well.

**Ralph Nader:** Well, what's interesting is leaks from laboratories are quite frequent around the world, in the U.S. The AP, Associated Press a few years ago had a series of articles about leaks including government installations in Maryland. So it's not so far-fetched. I mean, it's a very difficult thing making sure that there's no negligence in handling all of these deadly materials by hundreds, if not, thousands of people day after day. Well, I'm sure you've been asked this question, Alan, how do you define a fact and how do you define truth?

**Alan C. Miller:** Well, a fact is something that is verifiable and determinable. I think truth is really more than facts. It's about context as well and putting things in framework where they're, again, supported by credible, contextual, defensible evidence, and information.

**Ralph Nader:** And, of course, one can engage in follow-up questions on that. The law schools teach a course on evidence and it really is endless in terms of the permutations and how do you prove and what's beyond a reasonable doubt or preponderance of the evidence is inherently a murky gray line once you push it to certain limits. But if somebody's walking in the rain with a friend and says it's raining and the other friend said, "How do you know it's raining?" [chuckle] I think we know what a fact is. Alan Morrison who has argued cases before the [US] Supreme Court and was head of the Public Citizen Litigation Group, when he was teaching evidence at Harvard Law School, he started out the first day, he'd point to a student say, "What's your name?" and the student would say his or her name, and he'd say, "How can you prove that? How do you know that?" [chuckle] So now...and here's a real question, I think our listeners are asked, how do you measure success? How do you know that...after all these years more and more students, more and more adults are catching on with what you're talking about, because if people do not go through life relying on facts and truth, they're endangering themselves. They're being very gullible to say advertisements that offer products that are dangerous to them like happens all the time, or they support politicians who lie to them and then turn their back on them when they get into office. I mean, when you're separated from reality, which I think is a nice word, when you're separated from reality in your day-to-day interactions you really are living a highly risky existence. I mean, you can't connect with reality. I mean, when you cross the street you want to connect with reality, right, to make sure that there are no cars coming. How do you deal with that?

**Alan C. Miller:** Well, you're absolutely right, we believe that being news literate is an essential skill, a survival skill in the information age. It's necessary to be an informed, equal and engaged participant in the civic life of one's communities and one's country. And you're right that not only do people put themselves at risk, and we've seen plenty of examples of that in the past year between the pandemic and issues around vaccines and, of course, the events of January 6 at the Capitol. But they put others at risk as well, whether they're inadvertently misinforming friends and family by sharing things or putting the democracy in peril. So we have measured success from the beginning by doing pre and post unit assessments of students who are using our programs particularly now, Checkology. And what we found is that students who complete lessons are better able to identify the standards and rules for news organizations and journalists to follow to produce quality journalism. They have a greater confidence in their ability to recognize pieces of online content as being false or being credible. They understand the watchdog role of a free press, and they both are more knowledgeable of and

more appreciative of the role of a First Amendment in a democracy. They're more likely to engage with news and credible information and really engage in a more confident way with the wider world as well.

**Ralph Nader:** Have you found school quiz shows a good technique?

**Alan C. Miller:** We have used quizzes ourselves. Quizzes and contests, and we found that they are a good way to engage students in the public.

**Ralph Nader:** I think in addition to talking about what happens to people who don't connect with reality, I found in my attempt to communicate with people another way, and that is the moment youngsters classify themselves or are classified as consumers or liberals or whatever political classification they choose to fall into, they pretty much start tuning out facts that don't agree with ideology; facts that don't agree with the politician that represents that, say, conservative, liberal ideology. And they start in effect censoring themselves out of factual information and truthful information. So I always say to people, "Why are you categorizing yourself? You're only 18. You're only 21. How do you know you're a conservative?" Then I give them examples where their responses indicate that they aren't that conservative. So, have you ever tried to work that arena in order to have greater receptivity to what you're trying to do overall?

**Alan C. Miller:** Well, first of all, you're absolutely right. I think when people tend to see their news and information through prisms of red and blue they see the world in terms that are more black and white. And they close themselves off from ideas that contradict their beliefs and let emotion overwhelm reason and evidence. And we do see this. I spent a lot of time in classrooms our first 10 years when we had a high-tech classroom program and you can see students who are beginning to fall into those filter bubbles and those habits of mind and consumption habits. So I think it's critically important that we encourage them to both have the skills to determine what's credible to be mindful about what they're consuming, but also to get a wider array of sources and to challenge their beliefs. And we see this in terms of educators talking about the change after using Checkology in their classrooms, the change in the dialogue among students that it's more evidence-based, that it's more civil, and that students are challenging each other, "How do you know that? What's your evidence? How do you support that?" as opposed to simply arguing about opinions that they may have picked up in *the Onion* or from some hyperpartisan site.

**Ralph Nader:** You offer debate formats? That's another way to get at the truth.

**Alan C. Miller:** We don't formally do that, but what...again, what we found is that for classrooms that are engaging in that dialogue or that debate that what we're providing creates a framework for doing so in ways that are based on credible information and civil exchange.

**Ralph Nader:** Well, I want to give our listeners an opportunity to connect with you and we're going to repeat what I'm asking Alan to say right now so you can go get a pencil or paper or whatever later, listeners. Tell our listeners how they can contact you whether everything is online, or they can get something in print, and please spell out Checkology.

**Alan C. Miller:** Sure. So you can find our website with a great deal of information about us at [newslit.org](http://newslit.org). We also have a separate site for Checkology which is C-H-E-C-K-O-L-O-G-Y, and that's [checkology.org](http://checkology.org), and that's the virtual classroom. You can contact us to register for our newsletters that's *The Sift* or *Get Smart about News* at [info@newslit.org](mailto:info@newslit.org). And you can

find our app Informable on the App Store or Google Play. And listen to our podcast, *Is that a Fact?*. And then if you want to sign up for our other newsletters to learn about our activities and what we're doing, again, you can contact us to do that as well.

**Ralph Nader:** Have you ever had to retract something you asserted was a fact and then later on it turned out more evidence came out, and it wasn't a fact? How do you deal with corrections that newspapers publish often on page two of their paper?

**Alan C. Miller:** Well, again, in our case, we are generally not playing that role. We're, again, giving people a tool to make those judgments for themselves. And when we do cite things in our newsletters, we're citing the sources from which they come. We ourselves generally, if we were to make a mistake of some kind, we would certainly correct it; that's part of our standards. And it's something that we encourage the public to look for in any news or information they're consuming, whether there is a process for people to register complaints, whether it's about factual errors, or bias or other matters, and whether the organization acknowledges and corrects those in a timely manner. I think that's one key for quality journalism.

**Ralph Nader:** In some of your materials you say that the News Literacy Project is endorsed by dozens of leading news organizations and supported by funders of journalism, civics, and education programs. "All agree News Literacy is an essential life skill". Is it really all agree? Do you have, say, right-wing journalists...right-wing journalism like *National Enquirer* or *American Conservative*, which isn't so right-wing anymore? Do you have *the Wall Street Journal*, for example, along with, I presume, *the Washington Post*, or AP? Who is turning you down?

**Alan C. Miller:** So generally, we...when we're looking for partnerships, we're looking for more mainstream outlets, whether they are legacy outlets or digital first. And we generally don't go to those who are more partisan on the extremes, but I will tell you *the Wall Street Journal* is a partner. They are involved with us. Dow Jones Foundation is a funder as well as News Corps. And in fact, we are doing an event with *the Journal* tomorrow. We do NewsLitCamps where we bring educators into a newsroom, either in person or now virtually, for a day of professional development and demystify the news-gathering process and let educators learn about news literacy and bring resources back to their classrooms.

**Ralph Nader:** This is really ironic because *the Wall Street Journal* over the years has been factually wrong again and again on the civil justice system or tort law in their editorials, not in their news stories so much, [but] in their editorials. How do you deal with something like that? You got a key sponsor and they're feeding this nonsense again and again to their readers off of their editorial board. Do you feel some sort of compunction here or some sort of interest in gently saying something to them, applying your own principles of the News Literacy Project to their own editorials?

**Alan C. Miller:** Well, we don't see our role as telling news organizations how to do their work. We think it's important and we do emphasize this that there is a distinction between news and opinion as you just mentioned and for people to understand that. And when they're looking at an editorial to look at it through a somewhat different lens than they would look at a news piece, and again, to make those judgments for themselves as to what is credible.

**Ralph Nader:** And you do that? You do that specifically?

**Alan C. Miller:** Yes, we do that in general. I mean, that's one of the things in the virtual classroom for instance that foundational lesson we have looks at the difference between news, opinion, advertising, propaganda based on primary purpose and encourages people to look at those through different lenses in assessing them and what to do with that information.

**Ralph Nader:** And every January there's a National News Literacy Week, is that correct?

**Alan C. Miller:** Yes. So we have another partner here, Scripps is our primary partner there and this is a week in which we really look to elevate the mission and its centrality to democracy and provide additional resources for the general public to become more news literate.

**Ralph Nader:** Do you connect with libraries at all?

**Alan C. Miller:** We do work with libraries. We have a lot of librarians who are using the platform. It's certainly very well aligned with information literacy and we find that it's quite valuable. In fact, we give an annual award in honor to an educator, and this year we're going to be giving that award to a librarian who really has used Checkology and our resources throughout her school with educators in that school.

**Ralph Nader:** That's wonderful. You have a section on global education. You're going international? Do you go into foreign languages?

**Alan C. Miller:** Well, we found when we first created Checkology in 2016, it was a domestic-focused platform; it's in English; we had a list on the First Amendment. And what we found is we had educators in countries throughout the world. We're well over 100 countries who have registered to use it because misinformation is really a global pandemic. And so we created a lesson on world press freedoms that includes journalists in countries like Russia, and Pakistan, and Mexico where there is not a great deal of press freedom talking about what it's like to do their work there. And we have created one of our lessons in Spanish as well as English. We are very much open to... we've done professional development around the world as well and we're certainly very much open to creating a version of Checkology that may be an international version or versions in different languages if there is funding and support to do that.

**Ralph Nader:** I would assume that there are similar groups in some countries abroad or is that inaccurate?

**Alan C. Miller:** There are organizations that are doing news or media literacy around the world. In fact, a few years ago, we actually worked with ten groups that were either introducing news literacy or looking to expand it, and we created a global playbook of our lessons learned and best practices and resources to share with them. And I've talked to journalists from around the world, who feel that this is an urgent problem in their country. In some cases coming from the government, you can see, and in some cases resulting in the murder of citizens in places like Miramar and India based on misinformation that's fueling tribal and religious hatred. So yes, I think that there is an opportunity here to do this on a global scale.

**Ralph Nader:** What are your frustrations? [On a] day-to-day basis what do you think the main hurdles are other than an out-of-control internet? Give us say three examples of the hurdles that you have to continually confront.

**Alan C. Miller:** So I would say the first thing is the fact that we have a decentralized education system and you've got 50 sets of state teaching standards, and we believe that news literacy is an essential skill that should be actually required for graduation from high school as a life skill. And to do that you need to change the standards in all of these states. And we look to play a role; there are others working on bringing back civics or increasing media literacy. Again, we think that news literacy is a central part of either, so one of the great challenges is finding ways to do that. We've built a network of educators. We've got over 40,000 educators who we've touched in some way and we're now building them to community practice and are going to encourage them to become advocates for systemic change in their schools and in their districts and states. So, that's a big priority, is to change the standards, because then you would embed news literacy to be a systemic lasting change. I think the other thing I would say is just finding more resources, more financial support to continue, not only to build our organization, which is doing a lot and to do much more, but particularly to push out to the general public and turn our mission into a national movement. I think that what we need to see is a sea change, in how people consume and share news and information, much like we've seen around issues like smoking and drunk driving and littering in our lifetime. So that people are more mindful and say, "I'm going to be part of an information solution and not part of a misinformation problem." And that they not only do that themselves but they encourage others to do that and they push back against misinformation. It's asymmetric now. The bad actors, the purveyors are having much more traction and getting much more impact and we can see it with the rise of the conspiratorial thinking, I think than those who are standing up for facts. And we need to change that dynamic as a country as quickly as possible and obviously we want to play a leading role in doing that.

**Ralph Nader:** We're talking with Alan C. Miller, Pulitzer Prize-Winning American Journalist, who started the News Literacy Project. I would have thought one of your answers would have been in terms of hurdles is the difficulty of measuring success. Because the civics school movement is so abstract in general that it's almost ludicrous. They say all the right things; they give general materials on civic courses to schools around the country, but after a while it becomes like blah, blah, blah, because they never come to grips with proper names, with the corrupt corporations in our nation's history. I'm not saying that you're at that level of abstraction, but isn't one of the big problems how do you measure success?

**Alan C. Miller:** Well we have a lot of metrics because we recognized from the beginning that we needed to do that, to have credibility. So, I had mentioned that we do assessments on Checkology. We see where we're moving the dial and we **are** moving it. Where, if we're not moving it sufficiently, we make adjustments to be more impactful. We're asking teachers to do assessments who use our resources and have their feedback. Even when we do our news lit camps, we asked educators, how they compare to other professional development, how valuable they are and whether they intend to use our resources in the classroom. Three-quarters to a hundred percent tell us they're very extremely valuable and they tend to use our resources. We go back six months later to see if they've actually done so. We also measure in terms of our growth and our reach, because that's a critical piece--whether it's the education from the education realm or the general public--to measure our growth. And we plan to do more of that going forward. At some point we'll be looking to do some of that with our general public resources as well.

**Ralph Nader:** Well usually when someone's trying to make real change, they get criticized and who's criticizing you?

**Alan C. Miller:** Well we have not come under a great deal of criticism. I think partly I believe it's because we have been so rigorously nonpartisan in our approach and people can look at...you can look at everything we do including Checkology at every word of text, every photo every video and determine if you think it has an agenda in some of some kind or is a biased resource. So we have not come under that kind of criticism that I'm aware of.

**Ralph Nader:** See the price you pay for that, may be you're too general and how can you not be criticized by Texas politicians today if you're into Texas?

**Alan C. Miller:** One reason I think we haven't come under that kind of attack is that we are rigorously nonpartisan in every respect. And it starts with our board, which includes people from both sides of the political spectrum--those who worked in the Clinton and Obama administration and those who worked in the Bush administration and the second Bush administration and a prominent Republican consultant. Our funders actually to the extent they're partisan, also reflect bipartisanship. All of our programs and resources are rigorously nonpartisan and even our internal policies in terms of both NLP social media and the staff's personal social media are also nonpartisan. And I think that this is one of the reasons that we've been able to get into schools in gray states, blue states, purple states throughout the country and not face that kind of pushback.

**Ralph Nader:** Steve and David do you want to pitch in here with Alan?

**Steve Skrovan:** Yeah, I have a question Alan. If you could take us through a specific example, for instance, there was an assertion out there that LeBron James said he didn't want to have anything to do with white people. Can you take us through that and how you would unpack that for your students and what lesson they would learn from that?

**Alan C. Miller:** Well, we actually use that as an example in our viral rumor rundown in *The Sift* and *Get Smart about News* as a matter of fact. And so we showed the, I think it was a meme or was it was a quote out of context as I recall. And so we showed what it was that had gone viral and then we explained where that came from and why it was misleading and untrue. And then used that as a lesson, a timely lesson and a teachable moment.

**Ralph Nader:** That's the value Alan of being specific, you see. I know you want to create a framework where the students and teachers pick up and then they provide their own specifics, in terms of their own issues that they're concerned about, discussing factually and truthfully. But that LeBron James example, you see that really gets the students to remember what more general principles you're advocating. David?

**David Feldman:** Yes this is great thank you. Have professional journalists given up on the idea of objectivity? Do they...seems to me that there was a time that journalism schools taught objectivity. And now it seems that journalists are saying it's impossible to be objective.

**Alan C. Miller:** Well there's a debate going on within journalism. I think generally speaking, journalism has moved away from the term objective or objectivity, because there's a recognition that nobody can be completely objective. And so I think those who still believe in sort of that idea, talk more about being impartial, not taking sides, but providing people with accurate contextual information, multiple sides of the story, not necessarily false balance, but getting at the truth of a particular subject or news report and then giving people the information they need to make up their own mind. There are others who say that journalists should actually declare their own partisanship or beliefs. I think that's problematic. From my

perspective, I think we've got a huge problem with trust in general and I think that that would further undermine trust. I also believe [you know] I spent 29 years as a reporter, and I do believe that it is possible for journalists to make themselves as aware of their own biases as they can, and then seek to counter those or put them aside in the news that they're sharing. I'll make one other point which is that you also have a process in newsrooms, and this is why it's so important to have greater diversity in newsrooms of all kinds, where things are vetted and things go up through an editing process and you have multiple eyes on much of what is produced and that's another way to weed out bias or unfairness in news accounts. It's an imperfect business. It always will be, but I still think it's a worthy aspiration.

**David Feldman:** Yes it's great.

**Ralph Nader:** I think one way, if I may suggest, maybe you've already done this, is that take a clue from the way the law schools teach cases. They teach principles, general principles of justice and then it devolves right down to actual cases, where plaintiffs are suing defendants and defendants are defending against plaintiffs, so that they root the principle in a practical application. Do you suggest, from what I hear you say Alan, you don't get into the case studies. I mean you don't like present like the AV-88 Harrier II jet that you got a prize on in exposing, what the Marine Corps were saying falsely about the safety of that aircraft. But do you suggest that they take your materials and attach them to local, community, or regional or national or international cases that are full of truth versus fiction?

**Alan C. Miller:** So we do provide examples throughout our work and in Checkology we deal with issues involving immigration or politics, a lesson on democracy's watchdog on investigative reporting is led by Wes Lowry, who talks about the work he did the Pulitzer Prize with *the Washington Post* looking into police shootings. We deal with issues relating to race and racial justice. We do this in the platform with specific cases and we do take students through them and as examples to teach the different lessons and topics and we do that every week when we're producing *The Sift* and *Get Smart about News*. They are all about specific rumors and conspiracy theories and hoaxes. So yes, we're using examples and journalists and experts on digital media to give students those critical thinking or have teachers give students those critical thinking skills.

**Ralph Nader:** I thought a quote that you have in your materials was really right on. It was by Patricia Hunt, a social studies teacher at Wakefield High School in Arlington, Virginia. And she says, "Our democracy can't survive if Americans are unable to distinguish facts, evidence, and science from conspiracy, bluster, and bombast." Well, we've certainly experienced that during the Trump administration and continuing assertions that the election was stolen. So it really is very functional. It's not just something that's a good thing to go through life with facts and the truth. It's functional the quality, the health, the safety, the productivity, the fulfillment of human possibilities of a society. So we're very thankful you're doing this, Alan. And once more and very slowly, can you tell our listeners how they can connect with you before we close?

**Alan C. Miller:** Sure. They can find us at [newslit.org](http://newslit.org); that's our website. They can find the virtual classroom at [checkology.org](http://checkology.org). They can get more information at [info@newslit.org](mailto:info@newslit.org); and they can find our app Informable at the app store or Google play.

**Ralph Nader:** And Newslit is N-E-W-S-L-I-T and Checkology is spelled?

**Alan C. Miller:** C-H-E-C-K-O-L-O-G-Y.

**Ralph Nader:** Well, thank you very much Alan. We've been talking with Alan C. Miller who is the founder and CEO of the News Literacy Project--to be continued. Thank you Alan.

**Alan C. Miller:** Thank you.

**Steve Skrovan:** We've been speaking with Alan Miller. We will link to the News Literacy Project at [ralphnaderradiohour.com](http://ralphnaderradiohour.com). Let's take a quick break; when we come back Ralph's going to answer some of your listener questions. 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 ~~year~~ Corporate Crime Reporter, "Morning Minute" for Friday, June 11, 2021; I'm Russell Mokhiber. Congresswoman Rosa DeLauro [Democrat/CT], introduced legislation last week that would direct the Food and Drug Administration to narrow loopholes that have allowed chemical companies to decide whether food chemicals are safe to eat. The Toxic Free Food Act directs the FDA to update a rule so that food companies would be prohibited from selling products with chemicals that have not been proven safe. It requires companies to provide the FDA and the public with safety data and makes clear that new chemicals and chemicals linked to cancer cannot be generally recognized as safe [GRAS]. The bill also requires the FDA to modernize its approach to evaluating chemical safety and systematically reassesses the safety of chemicals of concern in food. 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 Strovan along with David Feldman and Ralph. Hey, guys let's do some listener questions, David?

**David Feldman:** This one comes to us from Rod Sims. The subject is forced to accept binding arbitration. Ralph, I enjoy your show and I listen to it with great interest each week. My question is about being forced to accept binding arbitration. When I signed up for health coverage under the Affordable Care Act, I read a series of conditions, one of which was accepting binding arbitration to settle any future disputes. I had one choice: accept the narrowly-written set of legal conditions! The same is true of treatment in a doctor's office. Is there any way to combat this take it or leave it legal standard as a consumer and patient?

**Ralph Nader:** Well, this is what I call a micro dictatorship. These provisions have spread in many contracts between large vendors, like hospitals or credit card companies. There are some companies that don't do it. I suggest you go to the Public Justice website [[publicjustice.net](http://publicjustice.net)] to see if they have some information for you. But they put you in a bind, because if you cross out that they won't serve you. So you weigh the pluses and minuses of trying to find alternative services and you just sign on the dotted line, and they know that! However there are an increasing number, still a minority of judges, who invalidate it. They basically say it's coercive and it takes away your right under the [US] Constitution to have a trial by jury in a court of law. But as they say, that's still a minority. There's a bill that has been pending in Congress for 15 years or so, introduced originally by senator Al Franken, called the Arbitration Fairness bill. And the members of Congress so indentured to corporate interests, they wouldn't even pass it, much less be proud of restoring the rights of all Americans to their constitutional right of trial by jury. You may say, well how can a corporation s cross the Constitution right you have? Yes, it's simple they say you agreed to it. Because in the fine print they say, they have you signing an agreement to all such provisions.

**Steve Skrovan:** Thank you for the question Rod. So this next question is actually not a question. It's from our loyal listener Paul Kulas and he says, "Howdy Ralph, Steve and David." And he says, we can read this on the show and he says, "A while back I wrote that I was going to follow Ralph's lead, form a citizens group and demand that our Congresswoman Lauren Boebert, I guess he's in Colorado, attend a town hall meeting. I'm sorry to say I wasn't able to get it done. First, I have a business and a family; doing this is hard; it takes a lot of time and a person can't do it alone. My plan to get help was to start a Twitter account and reply to Boebert's tweets. From there my hope was to gather followers then hopefully a few of them would join me. I started a Twitter account; I'd respond to Boebert's tweets. I got 157 followers, but in the Twittiverse that's nothing. Then I'd send out tweets to my followers asking for help. I got people to say they'd help, but no one followed through. Then I tried to getting involved with the Democratic Party here in Eagle County [thinking] maybe I could get some of them to help--no luck. All I got was frustration and I couldn't get anyone to join me; couldn't find anyone who believed in town hall meetings. Their suggestion was to join them. So, I gave it a go. He offered me a nothing position on a nothing committee that accomplishes nothing. I had a front row seat to the movie, why Democrats get their asses kicked. Finally, have you followed [Congresswoman] Lauren Boebert? She's got to be in the top five of the world's worst persons list; every day following her, reading her lies and BS, seemed like a day in hell. By the end of the day I was miserable and angry because I was spending so much time following a miserable and angry person. Ralph, Steve and David, I tried, gave it my all. I spent hours each day on this, but I just couldn't get any help. I wrote emails to Steve on Public Citizen asking for suggestions, no reply. {I don't remember that but maybe that's one of the issues.} I wrote emails to others on Public Citizen, no reply. Finally, I gave up. Looking back even if I had the time I'm not sure I could do this. Boebert is Cruella de Vil. I don't want that kind of person taking up space in my head. I'd be dealing with democratic machine. I'd have to deal with all the frustration of contacting people who say, they're out there to help but don't. I can see why people, particularly younger people, don't want anything to do with politics. I don't know how you do it. Nevertheless, I've signed up to volunteer for the Democrat who is running against Boebert, because I'm not going down without a fight. I'm sorry; I gave it my all. Peace and love, Paul Kulas, Eagle Colorado.

**Ralph Nader:** Well, thank you Paul and I think the reason why Steve read this whole letter is because it's a widespread problem of never being able to get through to your member of Congress. No matter how much they sweet talk you before election time, they are increasingly developing a congressional iron curtain around Capitol Hill. Everybody I talk to including myself, when I talk to myself, experience the same problem. I'm trying to get through to Congressman Richard Neal from Western Massachusetts, the chairman of the powerful Ways and Means Tax Writing Committee; can't get through to him. There are efforts in Western Massachusetts with about 200 people signing a petition, wanting a virtual town meeting with Congressman Neal; no response by Congressman Neal. This is a very serious problem and the way you laid it out Paul, was like the introduction to a seminar of civic resurgence against Capitol Hill. Who do they think they are? We give them our sovereign power under the Constitution, 535 of them, and I must say, it isn't just Republicans who don't reply. Its right across the board, Democrats [and] Republicans, you can count on the fingers of one hand. Calling a member of Congress who responds either to a serious letter--they'll respond asking for some congratulatory letter for a high school senior, whose graduating high school. They do those sorts of robotic things, but when you send them a letter asking about a serious issue affecting the White House or the Department Of Defense or Congress itself, pending legislation, they don't respond and they've been getting away with it; because they don't

compete over responding. Now if you lost some VA check, they love to do that; it's called casework, in other words personal problem. They've got half of their staff working on those kinds of casework, contracts, going back to the district, grants that weren't received on time, all those sort of things. But when it comes to real public policy affecting the country and the world, they are AWOL. So this is very important and we ask listeners to send us similar examples with names of senators and representatives who are not being responsive to you, because we want to make a bigger issue out of this and the more evidence we have the bigger issue we can make out of it. Thank you, Paul.

**Steve Skrovan:** Ralph this seems to bump up against your talking about it's the Congress, it's the Congress. And here obviously is an example of an unresponsive Congress and it seems to me that the whole colonel, the whole genesis of Trumpism is that government is unresponsive and hey, maybe a businessman can cut through and so they latch on to this guy and you have this authoritarian movement in the country, that's looking for a strong man, who will respond to them. In Trump's case, he's a con man too, but that seems to be the source of the problem for everything. It's just and whether you say across the board, unresponsive government and this is what's causing all this anger.

**Ralph Nader:** Yes and no way of measuring it. They don't take polls of it. They just take a poll what do you think of Congress, and they come down at one point they came down to ten percent approval, but what do you think your individual member that usually comes in higher. But they don't talk about responsiveness, the way you just did. Now if you're a donor, you will get a response. If you're a business interest back in the district or in the state, you're likely to get a response. But if you're a citizen, pleading for a more democratic and just society in some detail in a letter or email or telephone call, forget it. And that's not going to go un-responded to. I really want to make a big deal out of this. And by the way, this lack of response is rife through corporations [that] don't respond to consumers; it's just like there's a practice now. Well, they can email us and we'll get it and we don't have to respond, because so many emails and we're overloaded. We know the excuses. When it comes to Congress with its six billion dollar budget and all the prerequisites that they have and the services they have and the pretensions that they have, no excuses. Years and years ago they would respond to every letter, I would meet senators and representatives and they'd say, "we respond to every letter; they may not like the response, but we respond to every letter."

**Steve Skrovan:** So Ralph, clarify for me, what you want to do is you want to collect more stories like this and to build evidence of this? Do we need more evidence of this? What's your idea?

**Ralph Nader:** Oh very much so. We need people naming their member of Congress in the House and Senate. So when we go forward with it, they're not going to be able to say, Well who are you? My members elected me overwhelmingly. Who are you to challenge the way I relate to members back home. Well, [chuckle] here's the evidence. You may have been re-elected or elected with heavy majorities in a blue state or a red state, where there's not much competition, but in between elections is what counts in evaluating you and here's the evidence.

**Steve Skrovan:** All right, very good. Thank you for your questions and comments. I want to thank our guest again Alan Miller. For those of you listening to the radio, that's our show. For you podcast listeners, stay tuned for some bonus material, we call "The Wrap Up". A transcript of the show will appear on the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour* website, soon after the episode is posted.

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

**Steve Skrovan:** And Ralph has provided two separate form letters to send to your representatives demanding they take action on corporate crime and taxing the rich. Just click on the clearly marked boxes in the right-hand corner of the *Ralph Nader Radio [Hour]* Landing Page and it's all laid out there for you to fill in and personalize any way you want. Go to [ralphnaderradiowhour.com](http://ralphnaderradiowhour.com) and take action.

**David Feldman:** To support Whirlwind Wheelchair, visit [whirlwindwheelchair.org](http://whirlwindwheelchair.org); they do great work showing people in the United States and around the world how to build sturdy, economical wheelchairs from local materials. Go to [whirlwindwheelchair.org](http://whirlwindwheelchair.org). Join us next week on the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour* when we'll welcome Dr. John Geyman to discuss his new book *America's Mighty Medical-Industrial Complex*. Thank you, Ralph.

**Ralph Nader:** And thank you everybody, and you'll like your sample copy of *the Progressive Populist*. I just gave 40 people, six-month subscriptions; that's what I think of that publication. I hope you agree.