

Steve Skrovan: Welcome to the Ralph Nader Radio Hour. My name is Steve Skrovan along with my co-host, David Feldman, who is back with us after having a bout with the flu. Welcome back David.

David Feldman: It's great to be back.

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

Ralph Nader: Hello, this is going to be a good program on emulation.

Steve Skrovan: Yes, it is, and on the show today, we're going to talk about, not only emulation, but Vikings, not the Minnesota Vikings football team and not Leif Erickson. We're gonna talk with activist author, George Lakey, about his book *Viking Economics: How Scandinavia Got It Right and How We Can Too*. I remember during the last presidential election campaign, that Bernie Sanders, he would hold up a place like Denmark, as an example of a country that had a high standard of living, great social safety net, free education, universal healthcare, and many commentators in this country would decry him for making the comparison, because the US was too big and diverse a country to be able to afford or implement those kinds of policies. Well, Mr. Lakey is here to help us sift through what is fact and what is myth in that regard. That's in the first half of the show. In the second half, we are going to talk about something we all can relate to on an everyday basis and that is the robo-calls we get from telemarketers. We are going to welcome Ian Barlow, who works at the Federal Trade Commission, which is the government agency that deals with consumer issues, and those of you who know Ralph's history, know that it was the FTC, where the first batch of young Nader's Raiders cut their teeth in the late 60s. In fact, it was covering those hearings about deceptive advertising, where Washington Post journalist, William Greider, actually coined the term Nader's Raiders. So Mr. Barlow is the coordinator for the "Do Not Call" program at the FTC. So, if you are tired of getting those kinds of calls, be sure to stick around for that conversation. As always, we will take a break in the middle to catch up with our tireless Corporate Crime Reporter, Russell Mokhiber, but first let's see what the Vikings are doing and what we should be doing, David?

David Feldman: George Lakey is a sociologist, author and activist, who for over six decades, has led more than 1500 social-change workshops on five continents. The first time he was arrested was back during the civil rights movement. He was recently arrested during his successful campaign to stop the nation's seventh largest bank from financing mountaintop removal coal mining. Those kinds of experiences have informed his new book, *How We Win: A Guide to Direct Action Nonviolent Campaigning*. He is also the author of *Viking Economics: How the Scandinavians Got It Right and How We Can Too*. Welcome to the Ralph Nader Radio Hour Professor George Lakey.

George Lakey: I am delighted to join you.

Ralph Nader: Yes indeed. Let's get right to your brand-new book, which is a paperback called *How We Win* and the cover has a V for victory sign and has some pretty good endorsers; Bill McKibben endorsed it. People who have written about civic action, Rebecca Solnit endorsed it and many others. So, I have a controversial question to start off. As you know better than most, there have been quite a few good books on civic organizing/nonviolent protest. Of course, all probably have read the *Rules for Radicals* by Saul Alinsky, the Chicago-based premier organizer of his time. So, let me ask you this question, because it is the same experience I have had. I mean I've sponsored and written books like that. *Public Citizen Action Manual* was one; the more recent one, *Breaking Through Power: It's Easier Than We Think*, and while it doesn't have the granular detail, that your fine book has, I think suffers the same neglect, which is these books never become best sellers. They are often not even used by neighbourhood organizers. What is it about the psychology of civically engaged people that doesn't get them to use these manuals the way a video game player uses a manual or the way a bridge player uses a manual, because it is a learning process and citizen activism should always be a work in progress in terms of developing greater and greater expertise and impact?

George Lakey: Well, what I've found among many, many organizers and activists is a belief that the particular situation they are facing is unique. Even one town to another it's amazing how this town you know, where I see something remarkable is going on and then the next town, next bookstore or something I want to talk about it and people say, 'Oh! But this town is different. We aren't the same as that town.' So, this insistence, a kind of reflex, 'my situation is unique', gets in the way of people understanding that there is a tremendous lot to be learned. I completely agree with you that this is completely crazy considering that so few of the professions really use best practices as the way they proceed--the way they solve problems. It's a weird kind of a cultural tic, I think among activists.

Ralph Nader: And it's self-defeating as well, because the more you get into the experience of people who have done organizing learning from them--this book is 220 pages--the more you realize that you are not going far enough towards the decision maker. So, I am on a real Congress focus here. Do you have that same experience, that they don't all the way to the final decision makers that can fulfil their dreams?

George Lakey: Well, I completely agree that the decision makers need to be approached and they need to be approached with a tremendous source of power and part of - I think - the culture of many activists, is a belief that we are not really powerful enough to make a difference; that is, there is growing evidence, that is the economic elite, and growing evidence in political science as well among peoples' perspective that the economic elite really rigs things and the puppet makers behind the puppets who are Congress, and if that's the case, then you know, how can we really stand up and be able to make things happen, which is why I wrote this particular book. Because I went back a hundred years and asked, empirically through research, what were the different movements doing that enabled them to overcome the opposition that was being reflected in the Congress of the day or the President? What is it that enabled them to overcome

the opposition in order to get progressive things to happen? And very often, it was the use of a nonviolent direct action campaign that really put them over the top. The civil rights movement, being full of clear examples, but all the way back to the women's suffrage movement that during World War I, against enormous opposition from Congress and from the President of the United States, were able to prevail, because the women figured out how to use nonviolent direct action in such a specific and focussed way that they were able to overcome the opposition. So, that's why I wrote the book actually, because I thought if people are feeling fairly powerless, fairly helpless, when they look at Washington and know how corrupt it can be, then what they need is to empower themselves through using a technology—a power technology like nonviolent direct action—that can actually prevail.

Ralph Nader: And you know, all the past changes at the national level had to go through Congress; we got safer cars because of Congress and pressure from the people, women's right to vote constitutional amendment at the start in Congress, the civil rights movement, the environmental movement, the workers' rights, the labor union laws, the progressive taxation, Medicare, Social Security. You'd think people would get the idea after a while, but part of it is they go through elementary school and learn nothing about civic engagement and civic skills, even though they are very idealistic and would love to connect with problems in their community, with what is happening to the rivers or the estuaries or where the drinking water comes from or how the townhall takes care of the roads and bridges. It doesn't happen. So, we can't rely on the educational system, although that's part of direct action. I think we'd get more civic skill teaching and engagement in the class or afternoon classes for students if they can't get the curriculum changed.

George Lakey: One of the lessons from the civil rights movement actually was starting smaller, in a sense smaller--that is 50,000 black people boycotting busses in Montgomery, Alabama, so that wasn't Congress right? That was going up against their local opposition, the segregationist opposition, but the important thing about that struggle in 1955 was that they won their local struggle and in the course of that empowered themselves so that other black people around the deep south, especially the students, moved very vigorously forward in the sit-in, student struggle. They empowered themselves by understanding we can win here, win there, win here, win there and then build up to the point, where with the Birmingham struggle, they could actually force the Congress to act and that was a very reluctant Congress, because it was by and large a democratic Congress, which didn't want to lose the solid south and didn't want to suffer the political consequences of being on the side of civil rights, but they were forced to do it anyway, because the direct action, the dislocation of a major industrial city called Birmingham, Alabama and the eyes of the world being upon the United States in a very exposed way; all of that put together forced Congress to move.

Ralph Nader: We all know it starts with the people back home connecting with some allies in Congress and then expanding the power in Congress, but I am amazed how people know where it has to start, but they don't seem to know where it ends. So, the idea of summoning their senators and representatives--it only takes about 500 distinct names on a petition with

addresses to get a senator come to your town meeting. We actually published the formal summons and they can't do it. I have talked about it again and again and they've convinced themselves they can't get their senators and representatives back to their own town meetings with the peoples' agenda, not the choreographed political town meetings that members of Congress have during congressional recess. And this has been going on and on, year after year. I've talked about it, others have talked about it. We've never had a Congress watchdog group be formed even though it could be on an agenda supported by conservatives and liberals. As you know there are a lot of changes in this country, the polls show, supported by conservatives and liberals; living wage is one, full Medicare For All is another. So where do you think the problem is in the psychology of the inclined civic activists here. Let's not just talk about

George Lakey: Well, I think Ralph you're documenting actually by the use of terrific examples, this helplessness that people feel. People feel overwhelmed and one result of that is a declining legitimacy of Federal Government, because people are more and more feeling it's simply rigged and there is no way that we, at the grassroots, can make a difference, which is why I wrote a book called How We Win, because if we learn to win by tackling goals that are reachable by us, which isn't you know...it's not likely that a town is going to make a huge difference nationally by mobilizing itself. But on the other hand, if Montgomery black people can win in Montgomery, if a nuclear power plant can be stopped, say going back to the 60s and 70s in that particular region, then people who are facing nuclear power - the threat of that in other parts of the country - also mobilize, because what does inspire us to move us out of the helplessness that you so accurately point to--what inspires us to move past a sense of helplessness to go ahead is to see people winning and realize, "Whoa, we can do that ourselves."

Ralph Nader: You know there's something none of us have figured out, no matter how experienced we are. You go back six decades; I go back six decades; we've talked to tens of thousands of people. We've worked with thousands of people with some success here and there. But, it does seem that the concentration of power is worse than it's been in a century and the members of Congress, with some exceptions, have been more indentured in more ways to corporate power that, it doesn't suffice anymore to say people feel helpless/hopeless, because they are getting harmed. If you had a family and your health insurer, with your premiums up to date, denied care and a member in your family died and this happens a lot in the country. Harvard Medical School study shows that even now under Obama Care 35,000 people died because they can't afford health insurance to get diagnosed and treated in time. You can imagine how many died from being denied under their health insurance.

George Lakey: Mmhmm.

Ralph Nader: And still they don't get angry. They get angry if there's a TV blackout of a football game. They get angry if they get ripped off by a cab driver. They get angry if certain slurs--ethnic, gender, racial slurs--they really go nuts on campus against bad words, but they don't mobilize against bad deeds. Now who has beaten the fight out of the American people.

Entertainment 24/7, internet, cell phone, addictions, fear of being sued, what is it George Lakey?

George Lakey: I think all of those are factors and yet there's one that doesn't tend to get paid attention to and that is the lack of vision in our political culture that is very different actually from the 60s and 70s, when there were a lot of visionaries around, you being one of the prominent ones, who were imagining and being able to be graphically descriptive for people. What would it be like to drive a safe car and so on? That envisioning what it could be if we join together and pressured to make that happen, that tended to retreat, because I think the Ronald Reagan-led counter offensive put the corporations back in saddle very securely, and so you gave up dreaming and started instead to think well, if we could at least hold on to previously attained gains that we've made. And most of the popular movements in the US from the 80s on went into a defensive mode, in which it was how can we hold on to this? How can women hold on to reproductive rights and so on and so on? And as you and I both know defence is never the way to win. It's always got to be going

Ralph Nader: That's right, once you are on defence, you are on defence forever:

George Lakey: Exactly, exactly.

Ralph Nader: You know I try to show people how easy it is to win. You know, I have this idea that if 1% of the people organized in Congress watchdog groups in every congressional district and even less than 1%, we'd have--1% is 2.5 million people adults organized, and if they spent 300 to 500 hours a year connected with each other around major turnarounds in the American people--the usual like adequate wages, the right to form labor unions, Medicare for all--the ones that are long overdue compared to Western Europe, which we are going to get to in a moment--as long as they represent public opinion, they can turn the Congress around, no matter how powerful the drug companies are, no matter how powerful Amazon is, no matter how powerful the banks are and I give examples to this. We did it in the 60s with a few thousand people around, because once you have majority opinion behind you and you've got a small but committed watchdog group, watching the two senators and representative, you start getting press, because the press will finally cover popular power if they see it is powerful--if they see that they can summon members of Congress to their own town meetings. Do you agree with the 1%?

George Lakey: Oh yes, in fact it has been empirically discovered by some political scientists based in Princeton; the lead author of the study is based in Princeton. It is easily googleable by going on the internet and asking for the oligarchy study. What they did was looked at examples of federal policies. They aggregated about over 1500 different federally made decisions over a period of 20 years and asked about each decision, where did the majority viewpoint stand on that? And where did the economic elite, the so-called 1%, stand on that and of course, often there was overlap, but when the majority took one position and the economic elite took a different position, it was the economic elite that in almost every case, won its point of view. In

other words, the study reluctantly concluded if democracy is the rule by the majority, that is not what we have in the United States.

Ralph Nader: And it is called “the oligarchy project?”

George Lakey: Well, the authors themselves didn't call the oligarchy... The BBC in covering it called it that, but the authors basically said this is no longer a democracy. The lead author for that study was a guy named Martin Gilens of Princeton - spelled G-I-L-E-N-S - and so it can be discovered by either googling Martin Gilens, because BBC named it the oligarchy study, that's the simple way; just go googling the oligarchy study and you will find it. The point I want to make about that is that people in agreement with Princeton are feeling helpless and hopeless in that it really is a 1% led or governed country, then it would require enormous lot of wins, I think. And my book is about how to win local campaigns and regional campaigns, so we can get that sense of self-confidence, but it would take [an] enormous lot of those poor people to unite across the dividing lines of different issues and understand, because so many of the progressive issues have the same veto that they face on a federal level, which is the economic elite, then it would make sense for our movements to merge and to unite and do what they did in the Viking Countries. That is what the Nordics did was they united various movements for the progressive change and threw out the economic elite's rule.

Ralph Nader: This is a great book, listeners. It's called *Viking Economics*. It should have been a best seller. The problem is we grow up in a culture where millions of students are told America is No.1, No.1, No.1. There is nothing we have to learn from other countries. So, we develop a kind of cultural arrogance, which hurts our country, because we aren't No.1 in many areas and we've got a lot to learn from other countries. I mean the whole credit-union movement, which now has 70 million Americans, members of credit unions, came from Canada, came from Quebec over a hundred years ago. They came to New Hampshire and taught people in New Hampshire how to form a credit union and be free of the banks. So, I am looking at this book, *Viking Economics*, and I am saying to myself, why didn't I hear about it until about five months ago? It came out, what, three years ago?

George Lakey: Yeah, 2016, right.

Ralph Nader: Okay, because what it does, it provides more than a vision. If you can't envision anything you can't imagine real possibilities and we're short on vision, as you pointed out, in our country and the academic world--is short on vision as pointed out in the book, *The End of Utopia* by a professor some years ago.

George Lakey: Very short on vision.

Ralph Nader: So, you have been of course to Scandinavia many times, you lived there, married a Scandinavian.

George Lakey: I actually live there, learned the language.

Ralph Nader: You start out in a very stunning way. You say, “In 1900, Norway was a severely impoverished country. It was a poor country.” And when I went to Norway for the first time in the 1960s, which was no more than 18 years after World War II, when Norway was quite pummelled by the Nazis, it was like an economic paradise. And that was in 1963 or so. By the way, I went there and I went to the Scandinavian Countries, George, because I wanted to bring back the concept of the ombudsman to America.

George Lakey: Oh, well done.

Ralph Nader: I drafted a bill for the Connecticut legislature [to] start an ombudsman, which would be an arm of the legislature watchdogging the executive branch in Hartford and I was accused of fronting for the Danish lobby.

George Lakey: Ralph, I didn’t know this story, I didn’t know this is the origin of the rise of the ombudsman here in the US. (Chuckling)

Ralph Nader: Yeah, so you were describing Norway and others and why don’t you just talk about some of the ways people in Scandinavia live, work, how they are paid, the social safety net? And it was all done by, as you pointed out, coalitions of labor unions, cooperatives and ...

George Lakey: Farmers, family farmers, very strongly felt. Yeah, they did develop a vision that was very very crucial for them, because as you know, whenever you have division in a country, there are the people in the middle who haven’t committed one way or the other and they are looking at what is being offered here and very smartly the progressive coalition offered a vision. They said, look, in the society we propose to organize, you will have healthcare. There will be no question about you getting what you needed from the healthcare system, because it will be designed for you and you will have access to higher education for free, because we do not think people should have to pay for higher education and you will have universal pensions, because we do not believe that old people should be poor. In fact, we don’t even think anybody should be poor. We think, poverty is so 19th century, there is just no – there is just no reason why a modern country should put up with poverty and we are going roll up our sleeves and deal with that, which as you said, by the time you got there in 1963, they had gotten rid of their slums. They used to have terrible slums in Oslo. Now they’d gotten rid of them, they had gotten rid of poverty. So, what the Norwegians and Swedes and Danes did in somewhat different decades--mostly the 1920s and around in the early 20th century, was they went to the broader number of people, people in the middle, and said, look, wouldn’t you like to subscribe to this? That means, you need to help us do the heavy lifting to make it happen. And so now they enjoy oh gosh, affordable childcare for everyone, right? One of the things they think is really wrong is discrimination against women in the workplace because of women’s traditional place being in the home with babies--well, that is a crazy idea; there is should be affordable childcare for all. And if for example, Ralph, let’s say that you are a mom, you are working in a firm, there is a

nursery in the firm, so you can bring your baby to the nursery, you get up to 2 hours-worth of nursing time on the job and you are paid for it. That is what they are doing.

Ralph Nader: In the US you don't even have universal maternal leave.

George Lakey: Leave, that's right and that was one of the earliest things--of course, people should have maternity leave and paternity leave, so they have got fathers being able to continue their wages while they are home taking care of the children.

Ralph Nader: How about paying family sick leave and grandparent family sick leave?

George Lakey: All of that, all of that, sick leave is also paid and if you need to, you know that you have a child that's highly disabled, then you are definitely paid for that and there's family allowance for each child, anyway on the top of whatever the special needs might be, so even you are rich Norwegian, you still get an allotment for the expenses of raising a child, because and here is the clink; this is the most important chapter I think in my book, which is that instead of creating programs for poor people, they understood they needed to create universal programs that provide benefits for everyone and then everyone will defend them! And so for example, universal pension for people, whether they are well off, or you know, working stiffs who haven't been able to put that much money aside, it's not a problem because there is the universal pension, there is the universal healthcare, there is universal everything and that really makes a huge difference in winning over people, first of all, and then implementing a system that provides way more equality than we can even dream of.

Ralph Nader: You know, Chuck Collins reviewed your book, and he quotes you as saying - I'm quoting you - "Movements need organizers, communicators, advocates, funders, nurturers, researchers, trainers, musicians, and artists, non-violent warriors and foot soldiers as well as visionary designers" and you add, "All were present in the Nordic Movements that challenged a thousand years of poverty and oppression, took the offensive and built democracy." Your Nordic model can serve as an inspiring model for our country. Now, here's the question. You haven't even begun to describe the many support systems there are in Scandinavia and they also have a much more vibrant foreign aid program. I mean when I went through Scandinavia, I concluded their major problem was boredom.

George Lakey: Well, what they do is have an efflorescence of culture in response to boredom. So many musicians that there aren't even enough concert venues in the summer; there are pop-up concerts by bands all over the place, because everybody is looking for performance space. It is a tremendous, artistic and a place for theatre; every village has a cultural center, where you can take lessons, you can learn to play jazz, or whatever it is you want to learn--kilns for the pottery makers and so on. They don't think work should be taking us over, in fact, they only work--the average now is 38 hours per week--and their goal, their national goal is to go to 30 hours a week, because they want people to have more time for hiking in the woods, enjoying

skiing in the winter, being with their families and meditating or doing whatever it is that they do for their spiritual life.

Ralph Nader: And what is the paid vacation. In this country, if you are not part of a union and get a paid vacation, there is no paid vacation.

George Lakey: Well, five weeks is standard. You might get six weeks if you have a particularly stressful job.

Ralph Nader: Six weeks paid vacation?

George Lakey: Yeah.

Ralph Nader: How about Sweden, isn't it seven?

George Lakey: Same, same, same. One of the interesting things to me about the Nordic Countries is they really watch each other and compete with each other for positive things. So, if Norway is making quick nearer goal for going carbon neutral for example, because climate is hugely on people's minds, then the Swedish – that puts the Swedish Parliament on pressure to advance their goal for going carbon neutral.

Ralph Nader: That's right. I notice that and you put Finland in the same category. Do you put the Netherlands too?

George Lakey: Not the Netherlands. Finland has a similar economic model. Netherlands is more capitalistic than the Nordic Countries are.

Ralph Nader: But of course, they do have capitalists; it's a mixed economy.

George Lakey: Oh yeah, they do, it is a mixed economy, so yeah, they do have capitalists. In fact, one of my favorite articles that I read while doing research was in Inc Magazine, which is a capitalist magazine. The senior editor headed his article on Norway, "In Norway Capitalists Say Yah to Socialism"

Ralph Nader: That's a Boston-based magazine by the way. We are talking about George Lakey, author of Viking Economics and a brand-new book, How We Win: A Guide to Nonviolent Direct Action Campaigning. Years ago, I read a book called Sweden, The Middle Way by Marquis Childs, I think [1948]

George Lakey: Yes, I read that, it's a beautiful book.

Ralph Nader: Yeah and the idea was to say Sweden is in the middle way between socialism and capitalism. It's a mixed system and it works and it was really a best seller and it got terrific

reviews, but I do not think it was as interestingly as written as your Viking Economics. What kind of reviews did you get on NPR and PBS when the book came out?

George Lakey: Well, the good news is that as soon as it came out, Bloomberg.com felt required to write about it. Atlantic Monthly wrote about it. Time Magazine put an article in about it. So, it did get--the Times London has a higher education section, which anoints a book of the week, each week, and I got book-of-the-week [award] in London, so it definitely got some important mainstream.

Ralph Nader: NPR and PBS?

George Lakey: NPR--Chicago, New York--some of the big stations and the major market stations, but not as much as I expected, actually.

Ralph Nader: Well, did Steve or David, do you have a question?

Steve Skrovan: Yeah, I have a question. This is the big question before we run out of time here is what do you say to the people in America who say, "Well, that's all very fine for them, but this country is too big, unwieldy and diverse to be able to scale those universal programs up".

George Lakey: Well, I was wondering the same thing as a researcher. What's the applicability to the US? And I learned a big lesson when I walked into an Oslo based research institute in Norway to interview the senior researchers there. I saw a photograph on the wall that showed the delegation, what looked like a delegation of the Chinese people. I said, that is interesting, and they said, "Yeah, they were sent by the Government of Beijing." They were top economists and policy makers and so on and they were sent to Norway to learn from us things that might be useful to them. Well, my jaw dropped open, because China, China makes the United States look small and also China makes the United States look homogenous by comparison with China. And there were Chinese experts in Norway - tiny Norway, 5 million people? So yeah, so the interviewer said, I mean the people I was going to interview said, "Yeah, we were wondering the same thing". In fact, we first of all asked them when we got and sat down at the table we said, "Look why are you here?" And they said, "Look, economics is actually very complex, it has got a lot of subsystems and so on; we know that you have been in a kind of laboratory, that is the way we look at you, we look at you as a laboratory for trying things out. Some things you try that work, some things do not and we are very interested in the things that worked for you, because maybe they can be scaled up, because in economics there are things that can be scaled up beautifully and then other things that are not so much and there's some innovations that are culturally specific and others that are universal and we are very pragmatic people. China is interested in getting the best from any place we can get it." And that got me thinking about social security. You know, in the United States we absolutely depend on it, but it works great in Iceland with 320,000 people and it works great in the United States expect ours is not nearly as generous as the Nordic region.

Ralph Nader: Before we conclude George Lakey, let me toss you a softball, because I know there are some listeners who are about to ask themselves, why doesn't Ralph ask George Lakey, how high the taxes are in Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Norway; that's where they get all their goodies. They are the highest taxed people in the world.

George Lakey: So true and they are so happy to pay it. Prime Minister bragged in the New York Times said that he ran twice winning--Prime Minister of Norway, won twice by promising the Norwegian people that he would not lower their taxes. The attitude in Scandinavia is let's get what we really want and then of course, we have to pay for it. In other words, there's no such thing as a high-quality life on the cheap. You need to pay for what you get and if you are willing to pay a lot, you would get a lot. That's true and a democracy would not be true in an oligarchy like we have, but it would be true if we had a democracy.

Ralph Nader: Just to summarize, how high are the taxes in Norway and Sweden and Denmark. Are they over 40%, not to mention what people get for their taxes which we do not get?

George Lakey: Right, it can be 40%, it can be 50% in different countries. The marginal tax rate is not as high as it was in the mid-60s in the United States actually. So, we actually had a higher marginal tax rate back in the day than they did.

Ralph Nader: And then there is the intangibles, aren't there Mr. Lakey? The level of anxiety, dread, fear in this country is far far greater. The economic insecurity--you can lose your life savings, you cannot get healthcare, you have double jobs at low pay. There's no unions to bargain for you. You got to pay \$800 a month for daycare. On and on and on, inadequate mass transit for example. So, you cannot put a dollar figure on the low level of anxiety, fear, and dread in Scandinavian countries compared to ours.

George Lakey: That's true. I think anyone - certainly my Norwegian relatives - would much prefer not to live in what they see as an extremely high-stress country called the United States and yet there is also an economic price that we pay. We pay a high economic price for the stress that we experience, the medical issues; we are losing life expectancy for example. It is very hard for me to imagine the kind of violence that Americans experience and the tremendous costliness of cleaning up after all the violence that we have and the tremendous costliness of police, the number of police we have and the tremendous waste of money on prisons and so on. All of that we wouldn't have if we had an egalitarian society like the Nordics.

David Feldman: I have a quick question, because Ralph kind of touched on this earlier. The identity politics in America serves the billionaire class. If we're fighting among each other, we are not going to come after the billionaire class and demand that they pay their fair share. What do we see in Scandinavia, when it comes to identity politics and people fighting among each other? Does a rising tide lift all boats and do people not hate each other as much as they do

here in the United States? Because we hate each other. So we do not want to give each other healthcare.

George Lakey: They do have identity defined groups that have moved forward strongly without the kind of strife that we have had and I think the major reason for the difference is because our society is so polarized by inequality. Now this is another study, actually this is a study that was done by a trio of political scientists who were trying to figure out, where does our polarization come from and why does it vary? Sometimes like in the 1950s it was not great, but now of course, it is enormous and what they found was that polarization follows the curve of inequality. The more inequality, the more polarization. Well, because the Nordics went through this process of egalitarianism and working their economy in a way that promoted equality rather than promoted inequality, it means that their differences - for example, the women's movement in those countries, the LGBT movement in those countries--yes, they were movements gathered around identity, but they did not need to face the nastiness that movements here face around identity and that makes them very defensive, of course, and then attack even more. They did not face that because they were emerging in the context of a more egalitarian society in which people could say, "Well okay, so we are all Swedes together here, and we have this discontented group who, yeah, they have a point don't they? So, I guess we have to change ways we have been ..."

David Feldman: I am sorry to belabor this, but can you sell this to the American people or at least the Democratic Party. I think Bernie tried to. Can you say class struggle trumps women's rights, the rights of gays, the plight of the African Americans--that we have to all come together and focus on class struggle? Can that be a winning platform for the Democrats?

George Lakey: No, I do not think if it's focusing - I mean Bernie went into that, right, when he was focusing so much on class and there was really that 1% that identity groups were saying, but what about us, what about us. So I go back, I was really influenced by Bayard Rustin, who was the lead strategist for the civil rights movement, very close to Dr. King, who kept saying that especially given our history of enslavement in this country, that especially the racial struggle is very bound up in our economic struggle and that we need to learn to see how these various sources of discrimination and prejudice are connected to the economic machinery such that we can unite as groups that are in some way marginalized--working class people marginalized but also women and see our marginalities as having in common the need to push the economic elite aside, which is actually ruling by dividing, and instead create an actual working democracy and once we have a democracy then the intensity of the sense of marginalization declines.

Ralph Nader: Well, we are unfortunately out of time. We have been talking with George Lakey, the author of *Viking Economics* and the new book, *How We Win: A Guide to Nonviolent Direct Action Campaigning*. I hope that you are going to do some webinars and seminars without having to travel very much, so you can reach more and more people who are very very serious in their living rooms and in their club rooms, so we can organize these Congress watchdog groups. Thank you very much George.

George Lakey: Thank you Ralph, thank you David and Steve.

Steve Skrovan: Thank you.

David Feldman: Thank you.

Steve Skrovan: We have been speaking with activist and author George Lakey whose book *Viking Economics: How The Scandinavians Got It Right-and How We Can, Too*. We will link to that at ralphnaderradiohour.com. When we come back, we are going to talk about how you can stop all those annoying telemarketing robo-calls with Ian Barlow, Coordinator of the Do Not Call program at the Federal Trade Commission, now let us check in with Russell Mokhiber in Washington DC.

Russell Mokhiber: From the National Press building in Washington DC, this is your Corporate Crime Reporter "Morning Minute" for Friday, February 08, 2019, I am Russell Mokhiber. They charged their clients fees as they gave bad advice. They charged their clients fees for doing nothing at all and sometimes they kept charging the fees after their customers had died. A royal commission appointed by the Australian government released a stinging report that criticized the country's powerful banking and financial service industry for bilking consumers and called for tougher regulations. That's according to a report in the New York Times. The report found that loan officers, mortgage brokers and many others acted to line their own pockets rather than helping customers. The report urged the government to reign in an industry that it said too often operated with a cavalier disregard for the welfare of the Australian people. Saying sorry and promising not to do it again has not prevented recurrence, said the report's authors. For the Corporate Crime Reporter, I am Russell Mokhiber.

Steve Skrovan: Thank you Russell. The Federal Trade Commission is a bipartisan federal agency with a unique dual mission in the market place: #1 to protect consumers, #2 to promote competition. Here from the FTC to let us know how to protect ourselves from unwanted phone calls is our next guest.

David Feldman: Ian Barlow is an attorney who works at the Federal Trade Commission as the coordinator for the Do Not Call Program. Thank you for taking our call. Welcome to the Ralph Nader Radio Hour, Ian Barlow.

Ian Barlow: Thanks for having me.

Ralph Nader: Let us get right to it. It is not a problem that needs much definition. Who doesn't get these robocalls again and again? Last year, according to the FTC, over 26 billion robocalls were placed in US phone numbers and that was up from 18 billion in 2017, so you can see the trend is getting incredibly intrusive, and I know a lot of people and I am sure my listeners do, where people do not pick up their phone anymore or if they rush with their phone, they may trip

and fall and find out it's a robocall from some country overseas. And there are also non robocalls that are very intrusive from people who call to sell something. So, what can be done about this?

Ian Barlow: Well, you are right that it is a pervasive problem that affects a lot of people. At the FTC we get about 4 to 5 hundred thousand complaints per month about unwanted calls, about 65% to 70% of which are about robocalls, as we define them, prerecorded messages. So at the FTC we are keenly aware that it is a pervasive problem and we have four standard pieces of advice that we give to consumers for how they can limit or reduce abusive and unwanted calls. But I do want to be clear, I do not know that there is a silver bullet that is going to stop all the calls, but we have some good advice that can help people reduce it and also aid our law enforcement efforts.

Ralph Nader: Let's hear the four pieces of advice.

Ian Barlow: Sure. So first we recommend everybody register their phones for the National Do Not Call Registry. This won't on its own prevent all calls, but it is going to do a couple of things. First, registering for the Do Not Call Registry will prevent calls from the telemarketers that comply with the law. So those people who do their duty and download the registry are not going to call you if you register. Second, it is going to let you know that if you still get a telemarketing call and you are on the Do Not Call Registry, it is likely illegal and you do not want to do business with people who are calling you illegally. So, it is also a good way to identify who is a legitimate caller and who is not. That leads to my second point, hang up. If they are using illegal method to contact you, you do not want to do business with that company or person and you do not want to give them your personal information, so just hang up right away.

Ralph Nader: And you do not even want to press 2 or 3, the way they ask you to.

Ian Barlow: Yeah, we do not recommend that. We recommend just hanging up immediately and not interacting, not indicating in anyway that the phone number is a valid phone number that is fielded by a live human being. And telemarketers look at their call records after the fact right, fraudsters too and they say look, these are people we are on the phone with for 20 seconds, 30 seconds, 5 minutes, that is an almost fail or somebody we almost persuaded with our scam, let's try them again. If you hang up immediately, you are less likely to be locked into that category. So, then our third piece of advice is report. Report the unwanted calls, abusive calls or illegal calls to us at the Federal Trade Commission by going to DoNoCall.gov and that is the same place consumers can register for the Do Not Call Registry. Just report the unwanted calls at Do Not Call.gov. The more data we have and the more complete information we have, the better we can target our law enforcement and the better we can understand the problem and then the fourth piece of advice we have to consumers is we recommend they consider a call-blocking application or call-blocking solution for their cell phones and land lines. For cell phones, there are a lot of call- blocking apps on the market in the android and iPhone app stores. Hundreds of apps [are] available and now many of the carriers are also making

call-blocking solutions available for home phones. For home phones, the best option is to contact your telephone service provider to see what options are available. But to summarize the four pieces of advice we give to consumers are:

Go to DoNotCall.gov and register for the Do Not Call Registry.

Hang up on unwanted, abusive or illegal calls.

Report the unwanted, illegal or abusive calls at DoNotCall.gov and

Consider a call-blocking application.

Ralph Nader: And still they pour into people's homes. In other words, as you say, there is not a real fix yet. You may reduce some of them, but look at the figures, they are going from 17 billion to 20 [billion] robocalls a year in 2017 to 26 billion robocalls in 2018. So, the callers are clever; they are designing around, how do they get over these things. How do they keep bypassing all these efforts that you point out?

Ian Barlow: Well, I think the first thing is the cost of placing robocalls is really low. It is really incredibly inexpensive to dial outbound internet-based telephone calls using voice technology, voice-over IP [Internet Protocol]. This technology is so inexpensive that it allows fraudsters and legitimate telemarketers, you know, companies that have a legitimate product, but nevertheless advertise and market their product in an abusive way. It lets them just mass dial at a volume and rate that makes it an incredibly efficient way for them to contact people. Now, there are a couple of reasons for this. First, the minutes for a long distance via voice dialing are incredibly inexpensive. There are few barriers to entry into this market and there are hundreds if not thousands of small companies that willingly provide voice-over IP for people who are engaged in autodialing. The second thing is the auto dialing software is widely available basically free, available as open-source software that anybody can go and download, and so it is just an incredibly inexpensive method of reaching potential customers or potential victims for a fraud.

Ralph Nader: So, what is the solution? I know, our listeners are saying, you know, I am on a Do Not Call list, I hang up, I tried to report once in a while, I will look into these blocking apps, is that the big defense, the blocking apps, are they more effective than everything else combined?

Ian Barlow: Well, the blocking of apps do offer a lot of protection for many consumers and there are all different kind of apps. They have different ways of approaching the situations. So, some of these apps will block everybody except the call in your contact list, right? But that may be too aggressive for some people; maybe you know, you have kids in school and you do not want to miss an automated call from their school, so you want a little less aggressive app and so there are many different varieties available, but that is one really effective method for consumers to protect themselves right now. But you know, going forward, there are some

technological advancements and solutions that the telecom industry is working on that we're pretty hopeful can help restore trust in the telephone network.

Ralph Nader: Well, I hope this has been a little satisfying to our listeners, and they don't throw up their hands. How can they contact the FTC again? You want to give that contact number?

Ian Barlow: Sure, so the best thing to do is, if you have complaints file them at DoNotCall.gov and it is a really easy system.

Ralph Nader: Is there a 1-800 number for a human being?

Ian Barlow: It is 888-382-1222.

Ralph Nader: Good, that's 888-382-1222.

Ian Barlow: That's right.

Ralph Nader: Thank you very much Ian Barlow of the Federal Trade Commission, and we are looking forward to some more powerful technological fix, and if possible more strenuous enforcement action.

Ian Barlow: Thank you very much, and we're proud of our enforcement; we have done 139 cases; 126 are finished. We have got \$1.5 billion in judgments and 121 million dollars in actual collections in our robocall and Do Not Call cases. And we are very proud of it, but we thank you for the opportunity to talk to consumers about our Robocall Program and what they can do to help themselves.

Ralph Nader: You are very welcome. I hope NPR and PBS avail themselves of a similar interview with you.

Ian Barlow: We hope so too. Thank you.

Ralph Nader: You're welcome.

Steve Skrovan: We have been speaking with Ian Barlow of the Federal Trade Commission who coordinates the Do Not Call Program. We will link to that program at ralphnaderradiohour.com. So, Ralph, we have little time, do you want to comment on President Trump's State of the Union address?

Ralph Nader: Yes, there are a lot of comments obviously, it is an hour and half address, but most of it he had nothing to do with, other than the fear he is projecting on border crisis and the catastrophe coming in the caravans which people on the border denied in subsequent interviews, but most of it, including the people he interviewed, including his rosy description and

selective description of economic progress, most of it, he had nothing to do with. Number 2 is that he had one sentence that was very ominous that I think the media missed, when he said, "We can have war and investigations"--looking at the members of Congress--"We can have war and investigations or we can have peace and legislation". I read that to mean, if the House of Representatives starts cornering Trump in terms of corruption and other problems, he'll start a war with Iran or some other country and I think that alternative that he posed and the agenda behind it should be more thoroughly explored by the media. The third was Stacey Abrams gave a very pleasing campaign speech for her possible run for the US Senate from Georgia. I would have preferred if she devoted the speech to what Donald Trump didn't talk about – didn't talk about, because he created a fantasy world about workers. In fact, right now, thousands of workers are about to be laid off in the GM Lordstown plant in Ohio that produces the Chevy Cruze and Trump has avoided facing up to that. Even though he threatened GM a couple of years ago that if they went to Mexico and they closed the plants, he'd go after them, and I sent an e-mail to Trump saying the GM is making a fool out of you, Mr. Trump, what are going to do about the Lordstown plant? It would have been nice if she had talked about what Trump left out, which is why he gets away with so much fantasy and lying; it's what he leaves out.

Steve Skrovan: Right.

David Feldman: If you were Speaker, would you appease him?

Ralph Nader: Yeah, once you are in that situation of a State of the Union address by the President of the United States, you have to be polite.

David Feldman: No, I am talking about in negotiations on the wall.

Ralph Nader: Oh, no you cannot give him a wall, because then you have said Mr. Trump, you can shut down the Federal Government and oppress and discomfort and jeopardize millions of Americans to get some little thing you want from the Congress, we are never going to give you that kind of freebie. You will never shut down the Federal Government as a negotiating position.

David Feldman: So, she shouldn't give him anything. There is talk of giving him a billion dollars towards the wall.

Ralph Nader: Well, we'll see.

Steve Skrovan: But would you do that? Would you give him a billion dollars... ?

Ralph Nader: I wouldn't give him anything relating to a barrier on the wall, because then he will crow about it and say, 'look, it worked, I shut down the Government and the Democrats gave me the wall', regardless of what word they used to describe it and they know that if they give

him anything for a barrier, they are going to reward his shutting down the government and he can do it again and again and get away with it.

Steve Skrovan: And, so can others later on with that example.

Ralph Nader: That's right.

David Feldman: So, she should just say no and let him shut the government down again?

Ralph Nader: No, he won't shut the government. He will try, he will either cave and say that he got some added money for border security and he is sending soldiers, more soldiers down there or he will try an emergency declaration, which will split the Republican Party in the Senate. Senator McConnell has implied that would happen and urged him not to do it. So, hold firm Democrats in the House.

Steve Skrovan: That's our show. I want to thank our guests again today George Lakey of *How We Win* and *Viking Economics* and Ian Barlow, Coordinator of the Do Not Call Program at the FTC. For those of you listening on the radio, we are going to check out now; for you podcast listeners stayed 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.

David Feldman: For Ralph's weekly column, it's free, go to nader.org. For more from Russell Mokhiber go to [corporate crime reporter.com](http://corporatecrime.com).

Steve Skrovan: And Ralph has got two new books out--the fable, *How The Rats Re-Formed the Congress*. (To acquire a copy of that go to RatsReformedCongress.org) and *To the Ramparts: How Bush and Obama Paved the Way for the Trump Presidency and Why It Isn't Too Late to Reverse Course*. We will link to that also.

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

Steve Skrovan: Our theme music, "Stand Up, Rise Up", was written and performed by Kemp Harris; our proofreader is Elisabeth Solomon.

David Feldman: Join us next week on the Ralph Nader Radio Hour when we speak to the former head of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, Gregory Jaczko, about how he changed his mind about nuclear power. Thank you Ralph.

Ralph Nader: Thank you everybody and it looks like people are ordering 5 to 10 copies at a time on *How the Rats Re-Formed the Congress* and it looks like they are having neighborhood discussions or living room discussions. That is when it all starts, that is how it all starts and that is what we are looking for. Go to RatsReformedCongress.org.

