



*On Oct. 16 in Brainerd, Minn. Bill Moyers gave the keynote address to the Environmental Grantmakers Association. In that speech he captured the moment at hand. Here is an excerpt from that lengthy and extraordinary presentation.*

My friend, Thomas Hearne, the president of Wake Forest University, reminded me recently that while the clock and the calendar make it seem as if our lives unfold hour by hour, day by day, our passage is marked by events – of celebration and crisis. We share those in common. They create the memories which make of us a history, and make of us a people, a nation.

Pearl Harbor was that event for my parents' generation. It changed their world, and it changed them. They never forgot the moment when the news reached them. For my generation it was the assassinations of the Kennedys and Martin Luther King, the bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church, the dogs and fire hoses in Alabama. Those events broke our hearts. We healed, but scars remain.

For this generation, that moment will be Sept. 11, 2001 – the worst act of terrorism in our nation's history. It has changed the country. It has changed us.

That's what terrorists intend. Terrorists don't want to own our land, wealth, monuments, buildings, fields or streams. They're not after tangible property. Sure, they aim to annihilate the targets they strike. But their real goal is to get inside our heads, our psyche and to deprive us – the survivors – of peace of mind, of trust, of faith; they aim to prevent us from believing again in a world of mercy, justice and love, or working to bring that better world to pass.

We have also been reminded that despite years of scandals and political corruption, despite the stream of stories of personal greed and pirates in Guccis scamming the treasury, despite the retreat from the public sphere and the turn toward private privilege, despite squalor for the poor and gated communities for the rich, we have been reminded that the great mass of Americans have not yet given up on the idea of "We, the People." And they have refused to accept the notion, promoted so diligently by our friends at the Heritage Foundation and by Grover Norquist and his right-wing ilk, that government – the public service – should be shrunk to a size where they can drown it in the bathtub (that's what Norquist said is their goal) ...

It didn't take long for the war time opportunists – the mercenaries of Washington, the lobbyists, lawyers and political fundraisers – to crawl out of their offices on K street determined to grab what they can for their clients. While in New York we are still attending memorial services, while everywhere Americans' cheeks are still stained with tears, while the President calls for patriotism, prayers and piety, the predators of Washington are up to their old tricks in the pursuit of private plunder at public expense ...

This is their game: they are counting on your patriotism to distract you from their plunder. They are counting on you to be standing at attention with your hand over your heart, pledging allegiance to the flag, while they pick your pocket. If, in the name of the war on terrorism, President Bush hands the state over to the energy industry, it's every patriot's duty to join the loyal opposition.

The playwright Tony Kushner wrote more than a decade ago, "There are moments in history when the fabric of everyday life unravels, and there is this unstable dynamism that allows for incredible social change in short periods of time. People and the world they're living in can be utterly transformed, either for the good or the bad, or some mixture of the two."

He's right. This could go either way.

Let's face it: they present citizens with no options but to climb back in the ring. We are in what educators call "a teachable moment." And we'll lose it if we roll over and shut up. What's at stake is democracy. Democracy wasn't cancelled on the 11th of September, but democracy won't survive if citizens turn into lemmings.

I know you see the magnitude of the challenge. I know you see what we're up against. I know you get it – the work that we must do. It's why you mustn't lose heart.

Your adversaries will call you unpatriotic for speaking the truth when conformity reigns. Ideologues will smear you for challenging the official view of reality. Mainstream media will ignore you, and those gasbags on cable TV and the radio talk shows will ridicule and vilify you. But I urge you to hold to these words: "In the course of fighting the present fire, we must not abandon our efforts to create fire-resistant structures of the future."

Those words were written by my friend Randy Kehler more than 10 years ago, as America geared up to fight the Gulf War. They ring as true today. Those fire-resistant structures must include an electoral system that is no longer dominated by big money, where the voices and problems of average people are attended on a fair and equal basis. They must include an energy system that is more sustainable, and less dangerous. And they must include a media that takes its responsibility to inform us as seriously as its interest in entertaining us.