



October 4, 2013

Full Show: Wendell Berry, Poet & Prophet

**BILL MOYERS:** This week on Moyers & Company... Wendell Berry, poet and prophet.

**WENDELL BERRY:** I've been talking for a long time about leadership from the bottom and I'm convinced perfectly that it's happening and the, that leadership consists of people who simply see something that needs to be done and they start doing it.

**BILL MOYERS:** And... Is this the canary in the coal mine?

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**BILL MOYERS:** Welcome. In this broadcast you will meet an effervescent man who still believes we can make democracy work. Later we'll talk about those people in Washington who refuse to let it work, but first Wendell Berry. A master of the written word, he rarely appears on television. For one thing, when he's not writing, he's farming—and that can keep a fellow busy from sunrise to sunset. But we met recently and after considerable persuasion he said "OK, bring your cameras with you." This portrait is the result. Produced with the Schumann Media Center, which I head.

**WENDELL BERRY:** We don't have a right to ask whether we're going to succeed or not. The only question we have a right to ask is what's the right thing to do? What does this earth require of us if we want to continue to live on it?

**BILL MOYERS:** For Wendell Berry, the defense of the Earth is a mission that admits no compromise. This quiet and modest man who lives and works far from the center of power on a farm in Kentucky where his family has lived for 200 years has become an outspoken, even angry advocate for a revolution in our treatment of the land.

**WENDELL BERRY:** “A Warning to My Readers.”

Do not think me gentle because I speak in praise of gentleness, or elegant because I honor the grace that keeps this world. I am a man crude as any, gross of speech, intolerant, stubborn, angry, full of fits and furies. That I may have spoken well at times, is not natural. A wonder is what it is.

**BILL MOYERS:** Berry rarely gives television interviews, but recently, here at St. Catharine College, near Louisville, he agreed to sit down with me to read some of his work and talk about his passions.

**PRESIDENT WILLIAM HUSTON:** Good morning everyone, my name is....

**BILL MOYERS:** It was a special occasion, from far and wide, friends and followers of Berry gathered in the Louisville area to celebrate the 35th Anniversary of his landmark work, *The Unsettling Of America*. It's one of forty books in Berry's prolific career: poems, essays, novels, short stories. The two day conference addressing what it will take to resettle America, brought together advocates of sustainable agriculture, environmentalists, leaders in the local food movement, and others who recognize Wendell Berry as a visionary.

**BILL MCKIBBEN:** He understood what was happening on this planet a long time before everybody else. He's, you might say, a prophet of responsibility.

**PATRICK HOLDEN:** This conference is at a very important moment because it's a turning point. You've got all the elders, the founders of the sustainable agriculture movement gathered here and we're all now involved with the need for a transition towards more sustainable food systems.

**VANDANA SHIVA:** I do see this as a defense of democracy and freedom, for survival. And so I'm here.

**BILL MOYERS:** It was just a year ago on Earth Day you said, “People who own the world outright for profit will have to be stopped by influence, by power, by us.” And some of us who have read you and followed you took that as an indication that maybe, maybe the mad farmer is getting a little madder, a little more radical.

**WENDELL BERRY:** Well I have grown more radical the older I've become. I don't remember saying that, but it sounds like me.

**BILL MOYERS:** Which is why I could have made it up, but I didn't.

**WENDELL BERRY:** Well when you say you have to stop somebody, in our time, you would... ought to qualify. You don't mean bomb them. And I didn't mean stop them by violence, but they do have to be stopped.

“The Contrariness of the Mad Farmer.”

I am done with apologies. If contrariness is my inheritance and destiny, so be it. If it is my mission to go in at exits and come out at entrances, so be it. I have planted by the stars in defiance of the experts, and tilled somewhat by incantation and by singing, and reaped, as I knew, by luck in Heaven's favor, in spite of the best advice...

**BILL MCKIBBEN:** He is one of if not the great writer at work in American letters right now, he's built this body of work that's coherence, cohesive, powerful, beautiful, quite amazing. And it also happens that it's about the most important subject that we have. Whether or not we're going to be able

to build the kind of communities that can successfully inhabit this Earth or not.

**BILL MOYERS:** As he nears 80 years of age, Berry is going beyond words to civil disobedience.

**WENDELL BERRY:** Keep up the good fight you all.

**BILL MOYERS:** In 2011 he joined a four day sit-in at the Kentucky governor's office to protest the mountaintop removal of coal.

What prompted that? A man your age?

**WENDELL BERRY:** Well good company. What prompted me was the thought that when you have a major problem in your state, to which state government is utterly indifferent, and you've taken every obvious and legitimate recourse, trying to meet and talk and influence and demonstrate and speak and write and nothing had worked.

**BILL MOYERS:** Why is that? Why do we concede to organizations like the coal companies such monolithic control over resources that should be the people's?

**WENDELL BERRY:** Because in our society, people with money are bigger and more powerful and more noticeable and count more as citizens than people without much money. So we did confront the governor and tell him we weren't going to leave.

**WENDELL BERRY:** We're here to make our grievances and our petition heard.

And the governor then made a very, very clever move, he invited us to stay. And we did stay the whole weekend, did a lot of publicity for our side and were beautifully treated by the security staff. And people who sent us food and bedding and good wishes and even came in and gave us massages. And it was all together one of the loveliest weekends I've ever spent in my life.

**BILL MOYERS:** Are...are you going to do it again?

**WENDELL BERRY:** I don't think that there's any plan afoot again, but I wouldn't mind it.

**BILL MOYERS:** Did you have a conversation with the governor about why you were there and what you hoped would happen?

**WENDELL BERRY:** We tried to have a conversation with the governor and we tried previously to have a conversation with the governor, but the uh, state government of Kentucky is not set up for dialogue or discourse on difficult problems. The issue of clean water in eastern Kentucky has so far not been possible to raise in the halls of the government.

**BILL MOYERS:** What's happened to the water there?

**WENDELL BERRY:** Well it's being poisoned by the, uh, outflow from those strip mines. If you expose those streams to surface erosion and runoff you let loose all kinds of poisons. And so they're getting into the watershed.

**BILL MOYERS:** What do you think you accomplished. The streams are still flowing dirty in eastern...

**WENDELL BERRY:** The streams are still flowing dirty. But a lot has been done in the last 50 years to stop that and they're still flowing dirty. That's a tragedy and it's to be suffered. And I live on the Kentucky River. I know that it's got stuff in it that nobody is talking about. I know it has. For one thing, the native black willows are gone from the shores. For some reason, they can't live by the Kentucky River anymore. As a resident of the uh, Kentucky River valley, I feel directly is a threat. If the willows can't live there, how sure can I be that I will continue to be able to live there?

**BILL MOYERS:** Why can't they live there?

**WENDELL BERRY:** I don't know. It's something in the water. That's why we went down to the governor's office. This is intolerable. There's no excuse for it. And there's no justification for the permanent destruction of the world. My belief and I've written out of it for many years is that the world and our life in it are conditional gifts. We have the world to live in and the use of it to live from on the condition that we will take good care of it. And to take good care of it we have to know it and we have to know how to take care of it. And to know it and to be willing to take care of it, we have to love it. And we've ignored all that all these years.

**BILL MOYERS:** You wrote quite recently that the two great aims of industrialization, replacement of people by technology and the concentration of wealth in the hands of a small plutocracy seem, in your words, close to fulfillment. What do you think from your life's experience might stall the momentum and perhaps even reverse it?

**WENDELL BERRY:** I don't know. There are two or three things that we haven't been able to confront or even acknowledge politically. One is that the aim of the Industrial Revolution from year one has been to replace people with technology. So it's a little contemptible to hear these people express in surprise at this late date that we have an unemployment problem. I don't know that there's any politician of visibility who could say that. So that's, it's important for people like me to say it, who have no power.

The other thing that we're having trouble confronting and both sides are having trouble to confront it publicly and speak of it, is the disaster of being governed by the corporations. Those fictitious persons. And uh, you know you're waiting for the day when some politician of stature and visibility will finally say, we can't have this any longer, we're here in Washington or Frankfort to represent the people, not to be employed or bought by the corporations and to serve them.

**BILL MOYERS:** Are corporations which have been given person rights under the First Amendment, are they acting humanly, even though they possess.....

**WENDELL BERRY:** Well of course not. They can't act human. You can't have a bunch of people uh, combining into a person. That's not physically possible. In confronting these people who are so immensely more powerful than we are...they're in trouble on two fronts.

**BILL MOYERS:** The...the big corporations?

**WENDELL BERRY:** The big corporations. One is the people like these who are working against them so to speak from the inside. And then because their premises are wrong, creation is working against them from the outside.

**BILL MOYERS:** What have you come to understand is the natural logic of capitalism?

**WENDELL BERRY:** That you have a right to as much as you want of anything you want and by extension, the right to use any means available to get it. I've been talking for a long time about leadership from the bottom and I'm convinced perfectly that it's happening and the, that leadership consists of people who simply see something that needs to be done and they start doing it.

**BILL MOYERS:** I'm wondering if putting your faith in the people is a wise investment.

**WENDELL BERRY:** I'm not putting my faith in the people, I'm putting my faith in some of the people.

**BILL MOYERS:** Which ones?

**WENDELL BERRY:** The ones who are committed. These people. The, the country and I think Vandana could tell you, the world is full of people now who are doing what I just said, seeing something that needs to be done and starting to do it, without the government's permission, or official

advice, or expert advice, or applying for grants or anything else. They just start doing it.

**BILL MOYERS:** At the age of 30, Wendell Berry decided to return to the land of his birthplace. He left the writers life in New York City to settle on the farm in Kentucky with his wife Tanya.

**BILL MCKIBBEN:** One of the reasons that his realization and his writing was so powerful, was that it stemmed directly from his life and what he was doing. Had he written all the things that he wrote without that piece of land, they would have still been powerful but it was that wedding of man and message, of life and of idea that I think makes him uniquely powerful character in our culture.

**BILL MOYERS:** Can you talk about what sustains you, what has grounded you, you talked about coming home to Kentucky. Somehow it seems to me that your love for language, your...your continuing search to find the word that expresses precisely what you think. Your, your determination to do justice to the subject may have also grounded you. There's a remarkable consistency in the 40 books and works that you've produced.

**WENDELL BERRY:** Well, the language is secondary, but it imposes an obligation. I've been extraordinarily fortunate in my life. I've lived in a place I've loved. I've been a friend and ally with my brother all these years. Lived with a woman I've loved....love. It's a sacrament and it's probably some kind of necessity, to take responsibility, to be, to love somebody, and marriage is a way of acknowledging and accepting the responsibility.

**BILL MOYERS:** How long have you and Tanya been married?

**WENDELL BERRY:** Fifty...seven? Long time. And then I've had my children for neighbors, which is really unusual in, in our time, to have your children for neighbors. And then I've had a part in raising my grandchildren.

**BILL MOYERS:** Many years ago, you said, if you make a commitment and you stick to it to the end, there will be rewards.

**WENDELL BERRY:** Well that's a, that's...comes under the heading, faith.

**BILL MOYERS:** Faith. You still consider yourself a Christian.

**WENDELL BERRY:** I still consider myself a person who takes the gospels very seriously. And I read in them and am sometimes shamed by them and sometimes utterly baffled by them. But there is a good bit of the gospel that I do get, I think. I believe I understand it accurately. And I'm sticking to that. And I'm hanging on for the parts that I don't understand. And, you know willing to endure the shame of falling short as a price of admission. All that places a very heavy and exacting obligation on me as a writer. A lot of my writing I think has been, when it hasn't been in defense of precious things, has been a giving of thanks for precious things. So that enforces the art.

**BILL MOYERS:** What are the precious things that you think are endangered now?

**WENDELL BERRY:** It's mighty hard right now to think of anything that's precious that isn't endangered. But maybe that's an advantage. The poet, William Butler Yeats said somewhere, "things reveal themselves passing away." And it may be that the danger that we've now inflicted upon every precious thing reveals the preciousness of it and shows us our duty. Some of us, these people and their friends and allies that now cover the world, these people are free to acknowledge the preciousness of the precious things.

**BILL MOYERS:** When did you know you were free? And I ask that because of the poem you wrote, "The Peace of Wild Things."

**WENDELL BERRY:** You're free when you realize that you're willing to go to the length that's necessary.

**BILL MOYERS:** Then read your own poem.

**WENDELL BERRY:** This....this was a long time ago. "The Peace of Wild Things."

When despair for the world grows in me and I wake in the middle of the night at the least sound in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be, I go and lie down where the wood drake rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds. I come into the peace of wild things who do not tax their lives with forethought of grief. I come into the presence of still water. And I feel above me the day-blind stars waiting with their light. For a time I rest in the grace of the world and am free.

**BILL MOYERS:** The grace of the world, take that a little further for me.

**WENDELL BERRY:** I meant it in the religious sense. The people of, people of religious faith know that the world is, is maintained every day by the same force that created it. It's an article of my faith and belief, that all creatures live by breathing God's breath and participating in his spirit. And this means that the whole thing is holy. The whole shooting match. There are no sacred and unsacred places, there are only sacred and desecrated places. So finally I see those gouges in the surface mine country as desecrations, not just as land abuse. Not just as...as human oppression. But as desecration. As blasphemy.

**BILL MOYERS:** Let me read you this. "No amount..." This is you. "No amount of fiddling with capitalism to regulate and humanize it ... can for long disguise its failure" to conserve the wealth and health of nature. "Eroded, wasted, or degraded soils; damaged or destroyed ecosystems; extinction of biodiversity, species; whole landscapes defaced, gouged, flooded, or blown up ... thoughtless squandering of fossil fuels and fossil waters, of mineable minerals and ores, natural health and beauty replaced by a heartless and sickening ugliness. Perhaps its greatest success is an astounding increase in the destructiveness and therefore the profitability of war." That's as powerful an indictment of the consequences of runaway capitalism as I've ever read and surely if that's happening as we know it is, it takes more than reverence, and it takes more than words to try to reverse it. What do you say to those people who say Wendell, please tell me what I can do?

**WENDELL BERRY:** All right. Well, you've put me in the place I'm always winding up in and...that is to say well we've acknowledged that the problems are big, now where's the big solution? When you ask the question what is the big answer, then you're implying that we can impose the answer. But that's the problem we're in to start with, we've tried to impose the answers. The answers will come not from walking up to your farm and saying this is what I want and this is what I expect from you. You walk up and you say what do you need. And you commit yourself to say all right, I'm not going to do any extensive damage here until I know what it is that you are asking of me. And this can't be hurried. This is the dreadful situation that young people are in. I think of them and I say well, the situation you're in now is a situation that's going to call for a lot of patience. And to be patient in an emergency is a terrible trial.

**BILL MOYERS:** Among Wendell Berry's neighbors in Kentucky, young people are taking up that challenge. Jonas Hurley is an emergency room doctor, but he and his wife Julie want to become fulltime farmers.

**JONAS HURLEY:** We looked for about two years for land. We lived in a neighboring town, in town and just been dying to get...get some ground under our feet and looked for a couple years and found this little parcel of land a few years back. Not certified organic, but we don't use any, any chemicals. All of our own animal manures to fertilize the field.

**JULIE HURLEY:** Movable fences for the animals. That's key, movable fences. We move our fences around a lot just so the animals have fresh pasture regularly and then they leave behind what nurtures the field.

**JONAS HURLEY:** Good rich soil makes good strong plants, good strong plants can fight many, many diseases on their own. There's netting on the bottom because they will burrow out. Come on out. We're fairly well self-sufficient feeding ourselves and friends and family. We'd like for it to pay the bills so I can quite my day job and putter here and we'd like for it to you know help feed good food to our community.

**WENDELL BERRY:** I say to the young people, don't get into this with the idea that you're going to save it and solve all the problems even in your lifetime. The important thing to do is to learn all you can about where you are and if you're going to work there it becomes even more important to learn everything you can about that place to make common cause with that place and then resigning yourself, becoming patient enough to work with it over a long time. And then what you do is increase the possibility that you will make a good example and what we're looking for in this is good examples.

**BILL MOYERS:** You and Wes Jackson have proposed, speaking of patience, and part of the answer, a 50 year farm bill. What is the heart of it?

**WENDELL BERRY:** The heart of it is to recognize that agriculture as we are now practicing it involves a highly destructive ratio between people and land. More and more land is being used and used fairly destructively by fewer and fewer people. This...used destructively because the fewness of the people implies and requires a dependence on more and more mechanical power and more and more toxic chemicals.

**BILL MOYERS:** Arthur Young, a farmer whose land is down the road from St. Catharine College, learned for himself what chemicals can do.

**ARTHUR YOUNG:** I got to looking around at modern farming and I knew something was not right on my land. The water was running off quickly, it was not going in the soil, the land was becoming compacted, and I said this is not going to work. And I...I just said enough is enough and that's really when I got into this thing of sustained agriculture. See that little pile of dirt? That is a worm casting. It's very, very rich in nutrients. I'm on about my third year without fertilizer. Not a lot of synthetic stuff goes on this soil. But I know it's getting better because I can see the production and my grasses are getting better every year.

**BILL MOYERS:** You also recommend taking animals out of their confinement and putting them back in...

**WENDELL BERRY:** Putting them back on grass where they belong.

**BILL MOYERS:** Why?

**WENDELL BERRY:** Because in the first place it's wrong for people to mistreat fellow creatures. To use them inconsiderately and...and cruelly. Let me say that there is an inescapable cruelty involved in our life. We have to live at the expense of other creatures. Doesn't make any difference how vegetarian we are, we're still displacing other creatures. But the rule in using other creatures and I mean plants and animals is to use them with the minimum of violence.

**BILL MOYERS:** As you talk about that I thought of your poem, "For the Hog Killing." Would you read that?

**WENDELL BERRY:** All right. This is all about the...the practical ethics.

Let them stand still for the bullet, and stare the shooter in the eye, let them die while the sound of the shot is in the air, let them die as they fall, let the jugular blood spring hot to the knife, let its freshet be full, let this day begin again the change of hogs into people, not the other way around, for today we celebrate again our lives' wedding with the world, for by our hunger, by this provisioning, we renew the

bond.

**BILL MOYERS:** When you and I were born in 1934 there were almost seven million family farms in this country. There are now roughly around two million family farms and most of us are further away from the foundations of nature than we've ever been.

**WENDELL BERRY:** Well, there's another tough problem. And so you have to look ahead a little bit. I don't like to talk about the future very much because it doesn't exist, and we don't know anything about it. But one thing we know right now is that people want to be healthy and to be healthy you have to have a diverse diet and diverse agriculture employs a lot more people than monoculture. So you imagine people moving out into the landscape because it will pay them to do it. It'll be what we now vulgarly call job creation.

**BILL MOYERS:** But this will take a lot of patience, won't it?

**WENDELL BERRY:** It'll take a long time.

**BILL MOYERS:** Do we have time given what agribusiness is doing?

**WENDELL BERRY:** We don't have a right to ask that question. We have to ask what's the right thing to do and go ahead and do it and take no thought for the morrow.

**BILL MOYERS:** Resettling of America means....?

**WENDELL BERRY:** It means putting people on the land enough people on the land to take proper care of it and pay them decently for doing it. The fact that we and our families know the history of people having to leave the country because they couldn't make a living there, is the history of rural America. But that they left because they couldn't make a living is an indictment of our land policies. The idea that you have to go somewhere else, that you have to leave a fertile country in order to make a living is preposterous and it's a result of the wrong idea of what we mean by making a living in the first place. To make a living is not to make a killing, it's to have enough.

**BILL MOYERS:** What have you seen over a long life that prevents you from being fatally pessimistic?

**WENDELL BERRY:** Well, hope. And...and in my work, in my...especially in the essays, I've always been trying to construct or lay out, map out the grounds of a legitimate, authentic hope. And if you can find one good example, then you've got the grounds for hope. If you can change yourself, if you can make certain requirements of yourself that you are then able to fulfill, you have a reason for hope.

**BILL MOYERS:** Do you think that you've put yourself in front of the locomotive of history, waving your arms and shouting, "Stop!"?

**WENDELL BERRY:** Oh sure. And you can do that very comfortably if you're willing to be run over. I suppose I went with my friends to sit in the governor's office because I was willing to be run over.

**BILL MOYERS:** Were you?

**WENDELL BERRY:** Yeah. Of course. You can't do that without being willing to be...it's dangerous to...to do acts of civil disobedience. I think once you've...once you've crossed that line, well, something is settled.

**BILL MOYERS:** You've got to be contrary.

**WENDELL BERRY:** Well, you've got to be contrary, but there's a world of pleasure in contrariness.

"Dance," they told me, and I stood still, and while they stood quiet in line at the gate of the Kingdom, I danced. "Pray," they said, and I laughed, covering myself in the earth's brightnesses, and then stole off



gray into the midst of a revel, and prayed like an orphan. When they said, "I know that my Redeemer liveth," I told them, "He's dead." And when they told me, "God is dead," I answered, "He goes fishing every day in the Kentucky River. I see him often. ... Going against men, I've heard at times a deep harmony thrumming in the mixture, and when they asked me what I say I don't know. It is not the only or the easiest way to come to the truth. It is one way.

**BILL MOYERS:** So as you talked about hope and I thought of your poem, "A Poem on Hope", if you will read this.

**WENDELL BERRY:** All right.

It is hard to have hope. It is harder as you grow old, for hope must not depend on feeling good and there's the dream of loneliness at absolute midnight. You also have withdrawn belief in the present reality of the future, which surely will surprise us, and hope is harder when it cannot come by prediction anymore than by wishing. But stop dithering. The young ask the old to hope. What will you tell them? Tell them at least what you say to yourself. Because we have not made our lives to fit our places, the forests are ruined, the fields, eroded, the streams polluted, the mountains, overturned. Hope then to belong to your place by your own knowledge of what it is that no other place is, and by your caring for it, as you care for no other place... This knowledge cannot be taken from you by power or by wealth. It will stop your ears to the powerful when they ask for your faith, and to the wealthy when they ask for your land and your work. ... Be still and listen to the voices that belong to the stream banks and the trees and the open fields. ... Find your hope, then, on the ground under your feet. Your hope of Heaven, let it rest on the ground underfoot.... The world is no better than its places. Its places at last are no better than their people while their people continue in them. When the people make dark the light within them, the world darkens.

**BILL MOYERS:** Wendell Berry, thank you for...

You can add clairvoyance to the list of Wendell Berry's many talents. Eleven years ago, in an essay for *Orion Magazine*, he wrote, "If we make the world too toxic for honeybees, some compound brain, Monsanto perhaps, will invent tiny robots that will fly about pollinating flowers and making honey." This spring, Harvard University announced the first successful controlled flight of a "RoboBee" that could take the place of real bees and natural pollination.

It would be funny if it were not so sad. This past winter, a third of US honeybee colonies died or disappeared in a phenomenon scientists call Colony Collapse Disorder. More and more, the culprit is believed to be certain pesticides, fungicides and herbicides that may be killing bees or adversely affecting brain and nerve functions. In April, Europe announced a ban across the continent, the first in the world, to prevent the use of a kind of pesticide known as neonicotinoids. Activists in the United States are suing the EPA to impose a similar ban.

The world would be a lesser place without the honeybee. A quarter of our diet depends on their pollinating skills, but we also admire their beauty, and grace. Observe. The environmentalist and writer Bill McKibben narrates this short film, "Dance of the Honeybee."

**BILL MCKIBBEN:** Let's think about bees in a hive, they go out every day when the temperature is high enough. There're not like other farm animals, they're this weird wonderful cross between wild and domestic and they head out into the open world and they come back as it were, with reports about that world, you know, what it's like miles away. So one little bee yard some place is a kind of hub for understanding whole huge swath of territory. Understanding whether it's been farmed well, or treated as kind of a monoculture. Whether it's being saturated in pesticides or whether it's producing a wide beautiful variety of flowers of all kinds.

There're sort of accomplices in figuring how healthy and together our landscapes really are. One of the

reasons I like being out with bees is that you do sort of slow down and enter their world a little bit. I think they're quite beautiful, I like watching -- I confess -- I like watching in early spring the first few days of bees coming back with pollen and just sort of looking at the pollen in their saddle bags as they return and seeing what color it is and figuring out where--what tree it must of come from whatever. And there're beautiful and that you get a sense of indefatigability, I mean, this is an impossible task to, you know, three grains at a time produce enough honey at time to keep the colony alive over the winter, and yet they do it and there is something quite beautiful about that too.

I think most bee keepers are fascinated by bees themselves. This perfect example of the idea that humans could cooperate with another species to both of their mutual benefit we don't have very many examples of that in our society but that's what a bee hive is.

I mean honey bees are, like everything else on our planet, under all kinds of duress. I mean, the world in which we jointly inhabit is changing with enormous speed, so none of the patterns that any of us are used to exist in same way anymore. Bees are under treat because landscapes keep changing, we get better at everything that we do and take more cutting of hay, you know, we leave less time for clover to just sit there in the field. Life is speeding up for them just like it is for us and really neither us is coping very well with the results of that.

So, I mean, what we could do to help bees is exactly what we can do to help ourselves, try to slow down the pace of change in the world around us. Human societies aren't going to be able to cope with rapid climate change and neither can most animal societies, bees included. Human societies can't cope, turning everything into monoculture, neither can bees, they are a remarkable reminder for the need for a certain kind of stability, in terms of things like climate and the need for a certain kind of variety, in terms of landscape and what's around us. We need to be making at this point in our society some wise decisions about the years ahead and so we need to be using some of that same focused and determined decision making that bees has successfully employed over a great many millennium.

**BILL MOYERS:** And now to the people who refuse to let democracy work. The people who hate government so much they've shut it down. Unable to abide by the results of democracy when they don't win, they turned on it.

Republicans have now lost three successive elections to control the Senate and they've lost the last two presidential elections. Nonetheless, they fought tooth and nail to kill President Obama's health care initiative. They lost that fight, but with the corporate wing of Democrats, they managed to bend it toward private interests.

So we should be clear on this, Obamacare, as it's known, is deeply flawed. Big subsidies to the health insurance industry. A bonanza for lobbyists. No public option. And as *The New York Times* reported this week, "Millions of Poor Are Left Uncovered by Health Law." Largely because states controlled by Republicans refuse to expand Medicaid.

As far as our bought and paid for legislative process goes, Obama's initiative made it through the sausage factory. Yet even after both the House and Senate approved it, the president signed it, and the Supreme Court upheld it, the Republicans keep insisting on calling the law a "bill," thumbing their noses and refusing to accept that it is enacted legislation.

Now they're fighting to prevent it from being implemented. Here was their order of the day on Thursday from the popular right wing blog RedState.com:

"Congressmen, this is about shutting down Obamacare. Democrats keep talking about our refusal to compromise. They don't realize our compromise is defunding Obamacare. We actually want to repeal it. This is it. Our endgame is to leave the whole thing shut down until the President defunds Obamacare. And if he does not defund Obamacare, we leave the whole thing shut down."

Once upon a time when I was a young man working on Capitol Hill, it was commonplace that when a bill became law, everybody was unhappy with it. But you didn't bring down the government just because it wasn't perfect. You argue and fight and vote and then, due process having been at least raggedly served, on to the next fight.

That was a long time ago. Long before the Tea Party minority, armed with huge sums of secret money from rich donors, sucked the last bit of soul from the Grand Old Party of Abraham Lincoln. They became delusional. Then rabid. Like this:

**SENATOR STEVE KING:** If Obamacare is ever implemented and enforced, we will never recover from it. It is an unconstitutional takings of God-given American liberty.

**BILL MOYERS:** That's false, of course. Just like those right-wing talking points that keep grinding through the propaganda mills of Fox News:

**AINSLEY EARHARDT on *Fox and Friends*:** Thanks to Obamacare, doctors will be forced to ask patients about their sex life, even if it has nothing to do with the medical treatment that they are seeking at the time.

**BILL MOYERS:** Not true.

**MICHELLE MALKIN on *Fox and Friends*:** That healthcare plan puts a discount on the lives of elderly people and would result in the redistribution of health away from the elderly and the infirm to other special favored interests and patients.

**BILL MOYERS:** Again, not true. Nor is this, from the multi-millionaire fabulist Rush Limbaugh:

**RUSH LIMBAUGH from the *Rush Limbaugh Show*:** What we now have is the biggest tax increase in the history of the world. Obamacare is just a massive tax increase, that all it is.

**BILL MOYERS:** That's just a tiny sample of the lies and misinformation perpetrated by the right with the song and dance compliance of its richly paid mouthpieces. Sarah Palin set the bar for truth at about ankle height with those fictitious "death panels" that she still insists will decide our rendezvous with the Grim Reaper.

**SARAH PALIN on *Cashin' In*:** Of course there are death panels in there, but the important thing to remember is that's just one aspect of this atrocious, unaffordable, cumbersome, burdensome, evil policy of Obama's and that is Obamacare.

**BILL MOYERS:** Despite what they say, Obamacare is only one of their targets. Before they will allow the government to reopen, they demand employers be enabled to deny birth control coverage to female employees. They demand Obama cave on the Keystone pipeline. They demand the watchdogs over corporate pollution be muzzled, and the big, bad regulators of Wall Street sent home. Their ransom list goes on and on. The debt ceiling is next. They would have the government default on its obligations and responsibilities.

When the president refused to buckle to their extortion, they threw their tantrum. Like the die-hards of the racist South a century and a half ago, who would destroy the Union before giving up their slaves, so would these people burn the place down, sink the ship of state, and sow economic chaos to get their way. This says it all, they even shuttered the Statue of Liberty.

Watching all this from London, the noted commentator Martin Wolf, of the capitalist friendly *Financial Times*, says "America flirts with self-destruction."

This man is the biggest flirt of all, Newt Gingrich. It was Newt Gingrich who twenty years ago spearheaded the right-wing's virulent crusade against the norms of democratic government. As Speaker of the House he twice brought about shutdowns of the federal government once, believe it or not,

because he felt snubbed after riding on Air Force One with President Clinton and had to leave by the backdoor.

It was also Newt Gingrich, speaker Gingrich, who was caught lying to congressional investigators looking into charges of his ethical wrongdoing. His colleagues voted overwhelmingly, 395 to 28, to reprimand him. Pressure from his own party then prompted him to resign.

Yet even after his flame out, even after his recent bizarre race for the presidency bankrolled with money from admiring oligarchs, even after new allegations about his secret fundraising for right-wing candidates, Gingrich remains the darling of a fawning amnesic media.

**NEWT GINGRICH on *Crossfire*:** I'm Newt Gingrich on the right.

**BILL MOYERS:** On CNN.com the other day he issued a call to arms to his fellow bomb-throwers, "...don't cave on shutdown."

At least let's name this for what it is, sabotage of the democratic process. Secession by another means. And let's be clear about where such reckless ambition leads. As surely as night must follow day, the alternative to democracy is worse.

At our website, [BillMoyers.com](http://BillMoyers.com), there's an exclusive video interview with environmental activist Bill McKibben. That and a lot more are at [BillMoyers.com](http://BillMoyers.com). I'll see you there and I'll see you here, next time.

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