

Support for PBS.org provided by:

What's this?



# NOW

Home

Politics & Economy


Science & Health

Arts & Culture

Society & Community

- Discussion
- TV Schedule
- Newsletter
- For Educators
- Archive
- Topic Search

SEARCH:  [Find](#)





10.18.02

[Archive:](#)

## NOW Transcript

More on This Story:

 [print this page](#)

**Transcript** 

**ANNOUNCER:** You're watching NOW with Bill Moyers. With contributions from NPR news. This week on NOW...

The economy is on the ropes, but political contributions are breaking all the records as we head into the midterm elections.

**CHUCK LEWIS, CENTER FOR PUBLIC INTEGRITY:** If someone does something they shouldn't with money and politics, I think they should pay the fine out of their pocket.

**ANNOUNCER:** A capitol watchdog tells why the money just keeps coming. And corporate money flooding public schools and bringing with it a tidal wave of advertising.

**KATE YOUNG, PARENTS FOR PUBLIC SCHOOLS:** There is a sophisticated and aggressive marketing plan targeted to children.

**ANNOUNCER:** The controversy over public schools cutting big deals with big business. Are kids getting shortchanged?

And terror in the Washington suburbs and overseas. Why are the times so frightening?

**DR. ROBERT JAY LIFTON:** To think we can destroy all vulnerability is an illusion.

**ANNOUNCER:** A Bill Moyers interview with one of America's foremost observers of human behavior.

All that, and Bill Moyers Journal, tonight on NOW.

**MOYERS:** Welcome to NOW.

**MOYERS:** Welcome to NOW. President Bush is off on a marathon trip raising funds for Republican candidates. Coming up in three weeks is one of the most important mid-term elections ever. With control of public policy and the public purse at stake.

If Republicans take the Senate and House, they will control the federal government lock,

stock, and barrel for the first time in 50 years. The president is leaving nothing to chance.

**PRESIDENT BUSH (FROM TAPE):** I'm here to help the Republican Party. I'm here to help him get elected.

**MOYERS:** President Bush, fundraiser in chief, raised twice the amount Bill Clinton did for Democrats in 1994 Republicans have collected considerably more money than Democrats who are furiously trying to close the gap.

It's going to be a record year for spending. Look at some key Congressional races. A single race for the House of Representatives in Maryland's 8th district, \$6 million. They're raising even more in the Senate races. \$9 million each in Iowa, Illinois, New Hampshire. \$12 million in Missouri, Georgia and Texas. \$13 million in Massachusetts, \$15 million in Minnesota and in North Carolina and New Jersey, a whopping \$17 million for a Senate seat.

**GEORGE PATAKI COMMERCIAL:** These are challenging times.

**MOYERS:** The race for Governor of New York is turning into the most expensive non-presidential campaign in American history.

**GEORGE PATAKI COMMERCIAL:** In the past year something remarkable....

**MOYERS:** \$27 million for the Republican incumbent Pataki, \$11 million for his challenger McCall and a wealthy Independent candidate is spending almost \$40 million from his own pocket to challenge them both.

**GOLISANO CAMPAIGN COMMERCIAL:** Since I don't take their money, I don't need to make sweetheart deals.

**MOYERS:** In California, the incumbent Democratic Governor has one of the richest war chests of all. Over \$60 million and counting. **POLITICAL COMMERCIAL:** More than 500,000 new jobs in Texas.

**MOYERS:** All over the country television stations are the big winners even before the votes are counted.

Over a billion dollars in political advertising will have been spent by election day. What does all this money buy? That's something my guest knows all about. Once upon a time Chuck Lewis was a television journalist.

His last job was producing for 60 MINUTES. Then he went straight and in 1989 he founded the non-partisan Center for Public Integrity which makes him the loneliest man in Washington. Among his books are CHEATING OF AMERICA, and THE BUYING OF THE PRESIDENT 2000.

He and the Center are now among the country's most respected analysts of money and power. And I'm pleased to welcome Chuck Lewis to NOW.

You and I have been kindred spirits and allies on this issue of money in politics for a long time now.

In fact, I want my audience to know that many years ago when you were starting this center, the Schuman Foundation, which I head, was one of your important funders.

That's been some time now but I've been following the work you do and I have to begin by saying we haven't been very effective, have we, in reducing the influence of money in politics?

**CHUCK LEWIS:** No, you're right. We've told the world about the problem but the problem persists year in and year out. And these forces are so entrenched, they've been there for decades. There's more of them than ever. There were 62 lobbyists in 1968; today there's 20,000.

**MOYERS:** 62 in 1968? Registered lobbyists?

**CHUCK LEWIS:** Registered.

**MOYERS:** And now there are 20,000?

**CHUCK LEWIS:** 20,000, and it's probably higher.

Those are the ones that just register. So Washington is just swarming with folks that are trying to get favors, and politicians are beholden to them.

The bag men are the lobbyists who raise all this cash that we've just heard about. And so we have a... We just have an incredibly entrenched system, and the folks that sponsor our politicians have been doing it for years, and the politicians need their money and that's a mutual addiction, a dependency.

And they're enabling each other to do what they do. And it's very hard to break that hammer lock.

**MOYERS:** America pays the world's highest prices for drugs while the pharmaceutical industry has more lobbyists in Washington than there are members of Congress. Coincidence?

**CHUCK LEWIS:** Not a coincidence. It is a extremely powerful industry. And you know, whether it was the healthcare reform stuff of the mid-'90s or it's prescription drug things happening today, this industry does whatever it wants, essentially, in Washington. No... This is not an industry that's cowed by those in power; this is an industry that controls those in power.

**MOYERS:** Take the business scandals that have rocked us this year. Is there a relationship between those scandals and campaign contributions?

**CHUCK LEWIS:** No question about it. Throughout the 1990s we had a substantial deregulation, basically a steady aloofness by those in power of the accounting industry but also business in general in terms of deregulation. And these interests wanted to make sure government looked the other way and stepped back from their activities.

And you can point to precise bills and precise years. The accounting industry very famously got legislation limiting their liability in 1995 when the Securities and Exchange Commission wanted to do a tighter regulation of them in 1999, the Chairman was basically told to stand down and it was defeated.

Because these powerful corporate interests, business round table, a lot of these powerful corporate groups did not want too much regulation.

**MOYERS:** Perhaps the most powerful interest group in Washington is the national association of broadcasters which represents not only the media giants that control much of the industry but all of those stations out there that are benefiting from that billion dollars. So how do you break the hold when the media won't cover the problem that exists?

**CHUCK LEWIS:** Well, that is a lot of the problem. I mean, we looked at the media a few years ago...

**MOYERS:** The Center did.

**CHUCK LEWIS:** The Center did. And they spent \$11 million to kill campaign finance reform. They wanted to make...

**MOYERS:** Who did?

**CHUCK LEWIS:** The broadcast industry. They spent that kind of money. They took lawmakers on 315 all- expense-paid trips around the world to educate them about their issues, which is the kind of trip we'd all like to get.

The Federal Communications Commission, the agency that regulates broadcasters, they took them on 1,400 all-expense- paid trips around the world. And so the system is substantially rigged and controlled by the broadcasters.

Very few people want to go up against the broadcast industry because not only are they giving millions of dollars, \$75 million over a five-year period from all the media companies- - \$115 million spent in lobbying by these powerful interests, but they control your face...

Whether or not your face and voice are on the tube or on the airwaves. That's power.

**MOYERS:** So cable television fees have risen four times faster than inflation, while media ownership has been concentrated in fewer and fewer hands. Coincidence?

**CHUCK LEWIS:** I don't think so. But we were sold a bill of goods. When the telecommunications act of '96 passed, we were told because of free market enterprise, deregulating the cable industry, things like this would not happen. The prices that we pay on our monthly cable bill would go down. They've gone up about 20%.

**MOYERS:** Is there anyway to break the grip of money in politics?

**CHUCK LEWIS:** There are some basic things that are, I think, rather common sense. Number one is transparency. Any...

**MOYERS:** Openness.

**CHUCK LEWIS:** Openness...Any politician that's standing for office that has any entity that's secretly raising millions of dollars needs to be outed and they need to... They have a lot of explaining to do to the American people.

**MOYERS:** is transparency getting harder?

**CHUCK LEWIS:** Transparency is getting harder because there are some states that are sort of like the Cayman Islands where you can hide money in states.

And then what happens is they transfer the money around. They launder it around the country. So if I want to write a million dollars to some committee somewhere, then they'll send it out and it will be listed as a transfer in the records. Good luck figuring out what that money was about and what it bought.

The idea that in the 21st century we have secret committees and a secrecy system worse than Watergate 30 years after Watergate is utterly peculiar. So that's a no-brainer. Everyone says they're for disclosure. The bottom line is, that's a lot of hooey, they're not for disclosure. It's just a line they use. We need to hold them to that. So start with basics, like openness and disclosure.

The other thing is, what a concept, how about if we actually enforced our election laws? I know it sounds crazy. We have a federal election commission. To do an investigation of some problem, you have to have a majority vote, whether it's three Republicans, three Democrats. They can't issue a subpoena without a majority vote.

Gosh, 3-3, sorry, we can't investigate. So they lop off hundreds of violations to the election law every year; they don't even pursue it, because they can't get a majority vote. So we have an agency that is a toothless wonder.

**MOYERS:** Controlled by both parties.

**CHUCK LEWIS:** Controlled by both parties.

**MOYERS:** Whose interest is not the interest of the country.

**CHUCK LEWIS:** Exactly. It's been captured... The old thing about capture theory, the regulator has been captured by the people it's supposed to be regulating. And this happened years ago; it's just gotten much worse. So we need to enforce existing election laws tenaciously.

I mean, I'm really a hardcore person on this. Not only would I enforce the laws, if someone does something they shouldn't with money and politics, I think they should pay the fine out of their pocket. You know, the idea that they use campaign money to pay the fine, now talk about a wrist slap. And so...

**MOYERS:** I think they should go to jail.

**CHUCK LEWIS:** I do, too. So the bottom line is, we don't really want to enforce these laws the way it's set up in Washington. So these are basic.

This is not wild-eyed stuff. We're not talking... I'm not talking about things like public financing and all kinds of other theories and approaches. This is basic stuff. We don't do that.

**MOYERS:** A lot of people will tell you, Chuck-- I'm one of them-- that there is nothing new in this.

When I was in politics years ago people delivered money in bags to candidates for president in both parties.

That the hold of money over politics is a constant in our society. They even say it's too late to save democracy. Yet you keep trying.

**CHUCK LEWIS:** Well, I don't think it's too late to save democracy. I mean, who said that? Why would they say that? I mean, we're still living, aren't we? We're still breathing.

These decisions affect the air we breathe, the water we drink, the food we eat. We have a problem in this country. The most basic things that affect our daily lives, powerful interests have gotten in there and interfered with them.

**MOYERS:** Examples?

**CHUCK LEWIS:** We looked a few years ago at meat packing plants and food safety. Millions of people get sick every year from bad food.

**MOYERS:** Lots of cases lately.

**CHUCK LEWIS:** Lately, just in the last few days. And so, where is the government here? Well, we don't really inspect meat. We rely on the companies to inspect meat. We have a voluntary system. And no piece of legislation has made it to the floor of the house or senate in years, not since the mid-'80s. And we found that...

**MOYERS:** On this issue.

**CHUCK LEWIS:** On this industry.

**MOYERS:** To regulate the industry.

**CHUCK LEWIS:** Right. And the food industry has fed congress \$41 million in contributions to make sure they look the other way. And the key is to ball it up in the key committees. Well, that affects all of us. I don't want my two-year-old to eat a bad burger and get sick or worse. Why... This affects our life.

This is a hugely important thing. I'm not willing to give up on democracy. I mean, we need to know what these bastards are up to. I'm sorry, we do. And we need to start tracking them. We need to hold them accountable. And we need to ask them inconvenient questions.

You can't get a straight answer out of any politician today. They have a whole phalanx of aides that make sure you don't even talk to them. The only time we see them are in their paid ads that are all airbrushed and everything's perfect. And so finding the truth is becoming more and more difficult.

**MOYERS:** How do people find out about the Center for Public Integrity.

**CHUCK LEWIS:** You can go to the [publicintegrity.org](http://publicintegrity.org). That's our web site. There are a number of groups that are tracking these politicians and their activities. The center for public integrity is one of them. But if you need to find out about your politician as you get ready to vote, there's lots of places to go and do it. Ours is one of those sites, there's many out there.

**MOYERS:** Thank you very much, chuck lewis, center for public integrity.

**CHUCK LEWIS:** Thank you.

**MOYERS:** These days, it's pretty tough to find a place where someone isn't asking you to buy something that's bigger, better, bolder; a place that's hasn't been invaded by market values.

And now, you can scratch one more refuge off the list: our public schools, K-12. There is a booming market for private enterprise inside public schools. Everything from companies that actually run schools for profit to hard-sell advertising on classroom TVs and computers.

In South Carolina, some parents are up in arms over what this teaches the Pepsi Generation. And NPR's Emily Harris and NOW'S Greg Henry went there to find out why.

**EMILY HARRIS:** It's class changing time at West Ashley Public High School in Charleston County, South Carolina.

For a lot of students here, that means it's Pepsi time.

**STUDENT:** I just bought a Pepsi. Because I'm thirsty.

**STUDENT:** I just bought a Mountain Dew. I like it - it's chock full of caffeine and sugar.

**STUDENT:** It tastes good. I like Pepsi products.

**STUDENT:** Pepsi Rules the School You won't find a Coke for sale anywhere at West Ashley High School. You can't - it would be a breach of contract.

**EMILY HARRIS:** That's right. The entire Charleston school district, signed an exclusive deal with Pepsi, through a local bottler this past August. It stipulates that every drink vending machine in every school sells only products made by Pepsi, or distributed by Pepsi Bottling Group.

Pepsi ... diet Pepsi ... Mt. Dew. . . There is water for sale, but --- Pepsi owns that too.

Why would a public school sign a contract like this? Because it brings in a lot of money. Charleston county schools could get up to eight million dollars over five years. The actual amount depends significantly on how many drinks students buy. In return, Pepsi gets a leg up in the ongoing cola wars.

**STUDENT:** It really does help Pepsi, I guess because you know, I don't regularly drink Pepsi. And if I need sugar, I'm gonna go buy a Pepsi.

**STUDENT:** Pepsi gave the school a lot for them to advertise here. And I think because they did that, they should have the right to market to us.

**EMILY HARRIS:** All across America, school budgets keep getting tighter. So school districts have been looking elsewhere to make up the difference.

Increasingly, they have been cutting sweet deals with corporations. And not just for soda pop.

In Colorado, advertisements now line hallways and lunch rooms. Some school busses carry ads too.

Corporations give away millions of free textbook covers to market everything from snacks to skin care products to teen magazines.

And over 12-thousand public schools across the country use a free news program as part of the curriculum. Students are required to watch two minutes of commercials.

Here in Charleston County, the school board cut millions from its budget last year after a state funding shortfall. Board members voted nine to nothing to sign on the dotted line with Pepsi. To them it was easy money.

**BRIAN MOODY: CHARLESTON COUNTRY SCHOOL DISTRICT:** We already had the

drink machines in there. We already had the snack machines in there. So we take half of them and-- and change them to the company of the other half. And make eight million bucks over five years. So I mean it-- it really at the time seemed like a fairly-- innocuous and easy vote.

**EMILY HARRIS:** It didn't seem innocuous to Archie McRee, head of a local food bank.

**ARCHIE MCREE, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, LOWCOUNTRY FOOD BANK:** The response of the school committee has been almost one of saying well, God put drink machines in school at the beginning of creation and therefore since we have drink machines in school we ought to cut the best deal with the best company we can. No one it seems to me asked the question of whether they should be there at all.

**EMILY HARRIS:** McRee has joined a small but active group of concerned parents known as Parents for Public Schools. The organization has formed a task force to fight the soft drink contract.

Members say drink deals like these are one of the most ominous forms of school commercialization. Because, they say, the contract is designed so Charleston schools end up pushing soft drinks on their kids.

**KATE YOUNG, PARENTS FOR PUBLIC SCHOOLS:** There is a very sophisticated and aggressive marketing plan targeted to children and I just don't see any place for it in the schools.

**EMILY HARRIS:** Kate Young is a registered nurse with two children in the school district.

**KATE YOUNG:** I stood in opposition to any kind of contract that would have incentives that would in any way increase consumption, that was based on consumption targets. And that's precisely what this contract is.

**EMILY HARRIS:** It is true that the more kids drink, the more the schools make. But there are a lot of goodies that the district gets up front.

In their sales presentation to the Charleston School district, Pepsi Bottling Group showed how it works.

The district gets an annual fifty thousand dollars cash, after year one of the five year contract.

There's also scholarship money, free drinks for some events, and as if the district were a pro-sports superstar, it gets a signing bonus - one million dollars cash just for closing the deal.

But for all the up front money, the real pop to the contract is the commissions. More than half that potential 8 million dollars depends on the success of soda sales.

Schools get 40 cents every time someone spends a dollar on a drink from a vending machine. That jumps to 43 cents if the school installs one machine for every 125 students.

West Ashley High School has far surpassed that. It has one machine for every fifty students - 44 machines in all.

But, says the school board's Brian Moody, no one is forcing kids to drink.

**BRIAN MOODY:** I wouldn't say that it was a-- a direct incentive. I think it's a-- you know, there if-- if kids buy drinks, the school gets a result. Teachers aren't getting promoted to higher teaching positions and administrators aren't being graded higher based on their commission of Pepsi sales. I think it's a question of the things were already available. And the school will benefit from them. If, if the stuff is in fact is purchased.

**EMILY HARRIS:** To Parents for Public Schools, though, the set up sounds like a direct incentive. In fact, Pepsi Bottling Group's pitch to the district promised to help boost revenues with "powerful marketing programs." Including contests that will "generate excitement" and "drive increased purchase frequency"

**KATE YOUNG:** It's teaching excess. Drink it now. Drink it anytime. Drink it in the morning.

Drink it in your classes.

**EMILY HARRIS:** This push to consume has brought some local physicians to the parents' cause. Dr. Steven Willi is the head of Pediatric Endocrinology at the Medical University of South Carolina.

**DR. STEVEN WILLI, PEDIATRICIAN:** There's a link that's clearly tied between soda consumption and excessive weight gain. There's a link between excessive weight gain and Type 2 diabetes.

**EMILY HARRIS:** Over the past ten years, Willi has seen a tripling in the number of his patients that are suffering from diseases often tied to obesity. He says sugared drinks are an easy way to take in extra calories - and without enough exercise, those calories can turn into extra weight.

**DR. WILLI:** If you consumed an excess of 120 calories per-- per day, everyday, for one year, that would be an extra 12 pounds of weight gain. So you don't have to consume a great deal of excess calories for there to be a problem.

**EMILY HARRIS:** That 120 calories is just over one serving of sugared soda. A "serving" though, is only 8 ounces, not the 20 ounces found in the bottles that drop daily from most of the machines at West Ashley High School. Those larger bottles have as many as 275 calories apiece.

In Charleston schools, there are some beverages for sale beside sugared soda. Including diet drinks, and Pepsi's Aquafina brand of water. For Pepsi Bottling Group's Bob Marshall, this variety means kids can buy Pepsi products and still avoid excess calories.

**BOB MARSHALL, PEPSI BOTTLING GROUP:** We sell drinks that contain sugar. We also sell drinks that have no sugar. And we also sell Aquafina which, if you're familiar with our advertising, promises nothing. And we are expanding the variety and we are expanding the opportunity for healthy drinks. We are involved with the cafeteria program where we supply no carbonated soft drinks and all of the drinks that we sell are within the federal guidelines for meal programs.

**EMILY HARRIS:** That's true. US law requires that anything sold by the school food service exceed federal standards of minimal nutritional value. Pepsi's Fruitworks drink, with about 5% real juice and plenty of Vitamin C, does exceed that standard. But it is loaded with sugar.

Federal law also says that carbonated beverages cannot be sold during meals. So in Charleston County, drink machines located in school cafeterias are turned off at lunch. But students who want to can just stop by a machine on the way to eat.

Students stopping by soda machines is just what West Ashley High Principal Bob Olson had in mind when the school was designed.

**BOB OLSON, PRINCIPAL, WEST ASHLEY HIGH SCHOOL:** We went ahead and met with the architects and also met with our vendors to determine where good locations would be in the school. And if you look on just the first floor, we've got vending machines in all four corners. We don't want to have one machine with 30 kids lined up. We'd rather have four machines with seven kids lined up.

**EMILY HARRIS:**Spreading out the machines helps control hall traffic, Olson says. And plenty of students like having soft drinks easily available at school.

**STUDENT:** It gives you like a-- an energy to go on for the rest of the day

**STUDENT:** If students going to class say they couldn't afford the lunch in the cafeteria, at least they can afford a drink, you know, out of the soda machine, you know, and drink it in class. You know, keep them satisfied until they can get something.

**EMILY HARRIS:** Nationwide, about 200 public school districts have signed exclusive soft drink contracts. Some have had problems that reflect Charleston parents' concerns.

Four years ago in Colorado, a district administrator wrote a letter urging principals to push Coca-Cola sales. His district had signed a contract that promised yearly bonus payments,

but only if schools met sales targets set by Coke.

He signed the letter, the Coke Dude.

That same year a Georgia high school held something called "Coke In Education Day." Two students wore Pepsi T-shirts. One was suspended - the other disciplined for "inappropriate language or gestures."

**STUDENT:** Wearing the Pepsi T-shirt on Coke day, that would be the gesture.

**EMILY HARRIS:** Now many exclusive contracts, including Charleston's, spell out it's OK to wear clothing that carries competing soda labels. But the district label is still Pepsi.

**BRIAN MOODY:** Clearly I mean it's to sell more of their products. And probably to brand it at a younger age. I don't think what they're doing is rocket science.

**EMILY HARRIS:** The purveyors of Pepsi claim they don't sell in schools to increase overall sales. At least not in Charleston.

**BOB MARSHALL:** The school business does not-- from a volume perspective-- does not move the needle on our market share. When they go to school I think their buying habits or their preferences have really been pretty much established. But we've got marketing programs that we-- that we run that we hope will help us build brand loyalty.

**EMILY HARRIS:** Marshall says Pepsi is sold in the schools to help the community as much as to make a buck.

**BOB MARSHALL:** It offers us an opportunity, very honestly, to show our consumers in the area, and our employees children - and we have over 100 employees of Pepsi in this area. Their children attend these schools. And they see that we're involved, we're supporting the community, and I think that's ultimately good for everybody involved.

**EMILY HARRIS:** Parents for public schools does not agree! But they hold elected school board members responsible - not Pepsi.

**ARCHIE MCREE, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, LOWCOUNTRY FOOD BANK:** You can't blame Pepsi for trying to cut a deal with the Charleston --- department of Education, with the Charleston School Board. I don't blame Pepsi. Pepsi only did here what they were allowed to do.

**EMILY HARRIS:** The school board allowed the Pepsi contract because of the money. At West Ashley High, for example, revenue from vending machines amounts to about 3000 dollars a month. That's money that allows Principal Bob Olson to buy things for his school he otherwise couldn't afford. And best of all, from his perspective, there are no strings attached.

**BOB OLSON:** Obviously I'm not going to go out and spend it on things that are not good for the kids. But it gives you a little bit more freedom as to what you can spend it on. And also it's quick money that you don't have to go through a lot of channels to get approved and funded.

**EMILY HARRIS:** Although the district wide contract is just two months old, West Ashley already had its own deal with Pepsi in place. The results are everywhere.

So what are some of the things that Pepsi money has bought for the school?

**BOB OLSON:** Bought the landscaping, ah, sign board. It comes on and off by itself. It's great. When parents drive up in the morning we could put "Report cards go out today." The flags that your looking at right there.

**EMILY HARRIS:** The West Ashley one?

**BOB OLSON:** West Ashley flags, in fact I just bought another one last week I also bought the stand with it and the post. The palm trees around the light here, that was bought with vending money. And a lot of the funding we use to stock the fish in the lakes

**EMILY HARRIS:** And there's plenty more here that Pepsi money bought. In the chorus room - sound panels. In the gym, scoreboards. Outside, the concrete benches kids hang out on at lunch and after school.

Last year, Pepsi money even paid for paper. This year, it might be spent on college level textbooks.

All that contributes to some Charleston parents being quite comfortable with the Pepsi deal.

**PENNY PERALTA, PARENT:** I'm fine with the contract. I'm one of those parents that struggle with soft drinks and what we feed the kids at lunch, but if the drinks are going to be in school the school may as well benefit from them.

**LYNN CLARK, PARENT:** I personally don't care one way or the other because I have teenagers. They drink soft drinks at home, they're gonna drink soft drinks at school. I give them money for lunch, if they eat it they eat it, if not, not. Maybe for elementary school children it's different. For high school, I have no problem at all.

**EMILY HARRIS:** Still, Parents for Public Schools is calling on the school district to rescind its contract with the Pepsi Bottling Group. For now at least, it's a debate that isn't going away.

**ARCHIE MCREE:** We've tolerated drink machines in the school system for decades now. But when we start signing specific contracts that are built on consumption. Then I think it's time to draw the line in the sand and say enough's enough.

**BOB OLSON:** I'd hate to see this contract or any of the other agreements we have with the community taken away from the school, without a plan to replace that, the funds that are lost.

**KATE YOUNG:** So the alternative is to destroy children's health to educate them? I mean, is that the alternative? Is that what we've come to?

**BRIAN MOODY:** You know, I gotta keep the district funded. And I've gotta do it at a price that the tax payers-- think is reasonable.

**EMILY HARRIS:** Say what you will about Charleston's Pepsi contract, it is doing its small part to keep the district funded.

Remember that million dollar signing bonus? It's already gone to make up for last year's budget shortage.

**MOYERS:** There are places, however, that are saying no. In Los Angeles, the sale of soda will be banned in public schools beginning in 2004. To find out more on all this, check out our web site at pbs.org.

**MOYERS:** I often tell students that being a journalist comes with a license to explain things you don't understand. And right now, there are many things I can't comprehend at all. The bombing in Bali. The sniper in the Washington suburbs. The possibility of war in Iraq. So tonight, I've invited someone who has spent his life trying to understand the horror and violence that is an undeniable part of human experience.

Robert Jay Lifton is a Visiting Professor of Psychiatry at Harvard Medical School. And over his long career, he's studied-- among many other things--the aftermath of the Hiroshima bomb, Nazi doctors, and the cult that released poison gas in the Toyko subway. He is, in short, one of the world's foremost thinkers on why we humans do such awful things to each other. I'm glad to look to him for some answers on the madness of our time. Welcome to NOW.

**ROBERT JAY LIFTON:** Thank you.

**MOYERS:** What a moment. Our government in Washington has amassed a huge armada in the Middle East even as Washington residents can't walk safely around the streets of the nation's capital. How do you explain such dissonance, such circumstances?

**ROBERT JAY LIFTON:** Yes. In a way, it's not dissonance, because I think the amassing of the armada that you had described, the plan to invade Iraq, has to do with an American

intolerance of any vulnerability and a sense to annihilate whatever is perceived as threatening us.

That's a very dangerous kind of impulse, and now it's bound up with a sense of being the only super power, and therefore omnipotent in what we can do in the world.

But the sniper outside of Washington is a reminder, a kind of metaphor, that we can't control events, that all kinds of difficult and destructive behavior is always going to occur, and that we are vulnerable, and that to think we can destroy all vulnerability is an illusion.

**MOYERS:** There are people out there, as we learned on 9/11, who are trying to kill us.

**ROBERT JAY LIFTON:** Indeed. And 9/11 was not only a horrendous event but it was a crime against humanity by Nuremburg standards. We have...everything then depends upon how we respond to that event. And our impulses toward responding militarily toward trying to annihilate all terrorists because they seem to threaten us as opposed to taking necessary action against terrorism but doing it with restraint and looking at terrorism as a large problem far beyond the military.

**MOYERS:** What do you mean, restraint? What's the practical alternative to what we've been doing the last year?

**ROBERT JAY LIFTON:** Well, I think the practical alternative to what we've been doing in relation to terrorism is to act in concert with other countries, with other groups.

From the very beginning right after September 11th, all of the European powers, the United Nations, were all behind us and said, let's work together. Terrorism is a world problem not just an American problem.

**MOYERS:** LE MONDE, the French newspaper, had a huge headline that said, we are all Americans now.

**ROBERT JAY LIFTON:** Absolutely. That's the last time anybody said that, unfortunately, because we have tended to go it alone, and we have seen our response as necessarily expressing absolute American power. And that is really dangerous.

**MOYERS:** But we do have absolute American power. We can move at will in the world even though we may not be able to move safely on the streets of Washington.

**ROBERT JAY LIFTON:** That situation of our absolute power in the world has very dangerous psychological reverberations for us and for the world.

**MOYERS:** How so?

**ROBERT JAY LIFTON:** We develop what I call the super power syndrome. And what I mean by that is that we connect ourselves with the idea of being more than ordinarily powerful, super power, it's more than natural, and it has to do with a sense of omnipotence in the world.

**MOYERS:** When we talked a year ago, soon after 9/11, you said that your greatest fear was that this massive act of violence against the World Trade Center would lead to a cycle of violence. Do you see that happening now

**ROBERT JAY LIFTON:** That's exactly what happened. And I claim no wisdom about it, because it seemed quite evident. But yes, we've gotten into a cycle of violence so that we've responded very violently to the terrorism first by the war in Afghanistan and now the threatened war on Iraq.

And this creates a kind of back and forth pattern of violence in which we respond with extreme violence, and our violence has an apocalyptic quality. It's not exactly the same as Bin Laden by no means, but we also have this idea of destroying through this war on terrorism every last terrorist as though we could in some way purify the world from terrorism and win the victory. That can't happen.

**MOYERS:** But what does a people do when we know there are people out there who ought to be...you want to kill or be killed, determined to kill or be killed?

**ROBERT JAY LIFTON:** You do.... If people have already killed our citizens, of course we want to in some way find them and bring them to justice. That's what we stand for and should stand for.

But we want to do that ideally with most of the world working with us, doing it as a world problem. And that means that we do it in concert with other countries rather than see it as a particular American grievance which we have the right to respond to in any way we see fit.

**MOYERS:** What do you think is in the mind of the Islamic terrorist as they look at us? You've studied the psychology of people who do wicked things for much of your life, or violent things. What do you think is going through their mind as they look at America right now?

**ROBERT JAY LIFTON:** They can convince themselves through their radical ideology or theology that their killing Americans is an act of extreme virtue. And the logic goes that Americans are a danger to the world, Americans put soldiers in various sacred places, and Americans in some ways...

**MOYERS:** Sacred Islamic places like the soil of Saudi Arabia and Palestine, places like that.

**ROBERT JAY LIFTON:** That's right. And Americans are seen as the biggest barrier to some kind of Islamic goal or Islamic paradise. Therefore if you can destroy Americans or kill them it is an act of virtue.

And that's why I find myself saying that one has to be aware of any claim to absolute virtue, because it's absolute virtue that you call forth to kill large numbers of people. It may be impossible to do that without that claim.

**MOYERS:** What do you make of the rhetoric coming out of Washington these days from President Bush? He is talking about international collaboration through the UN, but saying that if that doesn't happen then the United States will have to do what is in its own interests.

**ROBERT JAY LIFTON:** Well, he has, in terms of his projected war on Iraq, he has started and sustained a rhetoric of what I call war fever. War fever means drum beating for war, and that creates very intense transcendent emotions, even ecstatic emotions.

But at the same time, as you say, he has gone to the United Nations and especially in recent days he has backtracked a little bit and has indicated, even though he has spoken belligerently, has indicated that he would like to work together with the United Nations and with other countries.

**MOYERS:** But the President seems to have really been stunned a year ago to discover just how vulnerable America is. And many people seem to have been stunned by that revelation through the devastation of 9/11. Now we seem to think that the danger is part of our everyday life.

**ROBERT JAY LIFTON:** You know, I think Americans have had several stages of response to 9/11. And the first stage is exactly what you just said: it was the sense of being shocked and stunned by the fact that we could be victimized in this way and that we were so vulnerable.

It's that sudden recognition and shock of vulnerability that really threw the whole country. And then there was a second stage which occurred very quickly, the Anthrax fears, which were a really visceral fear of bodily involvement. And then over time, over the course of that year, there occurred a sense of, this is going to be chronic. It will never go away.

But now there's a fourth stage, and that's the other side of the American ambivalence. The doubts, the uncertainties about the present policy and specifically about whether it's making us any safer. I don't think people feel any safer, and they're saying so.

But our administration isn't in a sense acknowledging that. It's fighting against any aspect of vulnerability, lashing out and seeking to wipe out or annihilate the sources of that vulnerability.

And I think that's wrong, and I think it's misleading, and it has the opposite effect because in this dynamic of violence all through the world, it creates more violence and it in a way

makes more attractive the terrorist cause.

**MOYERS:** I was struck that you told one of my colleagues that you thought President Bush was now seeing all these events, seeing the world, seeing his own life through the eyes of a survivor. Talk to me about that.

**ROBERT JAY LIFTON:** That's right. I mean, from September 11th all Americans became survivors. We were attacked, and of course, some people were very closely involved in the World Trade Center or the Pentagon, but the whole country experienced that shock of new vulnerability.

As President, George Bush felt that very keenly and his was the responsibility of leading this country as a survivor. As a survivor, I think, George Bush found meaning in life. Survivors always do seek meaning in that surviving, in order to find meaning in the rest of their lives. And he found it.

But his way of surviving was to take on a crusade, and they even called it that until they found out it wasn't a very great term. But, some sort of crusade against terrorism through which George Bush seemed to find a new meaning in life. If you absolute-ize that crusade...

**MOYERS:** Absolute-ize? If you...?

**ROBERT JAY LIFTON:** If you absolute-ize, or you make it... If you make the crusades so absolute that it sees nothing else in the world or very little else except that war on terrorism then you reach the kind of situation we're in now.

Even by declaring it a war on terrorism, I think it was misleading. You can't fight terrorism as a war in which you have soldiers and you annihilate the enemy and you win a victory and you're declared the winner. It doesn't work that way. It's more sporadic, unpredictable. So you have to get at its roots.

**MOYERS:** And life has to go on while you're fighting that campaign against terrorism, right? You can't just act as if that's the only thing in our lives.

**ROBERT JAY LIFTON:** Well, there's that also.

So much has been neglected while Bush and others have been preoccupied with the war on terrorism.

**MOYERS:** Are the Islamist terrorists in control of our gross national psychology right now?

**ROBERT JAY LIFTON:** I don't think the Islamist terrorists are in control of our gross national psychology, but they're involved in it more than perhaps they should be.

We are obsessed with them and perhaps we in a sense invest in them a certain kind of all powerful or omnipotent quality of a kind that we ourselves also embrace.

One has to see them as fallible also and has having vulnerabilities. I don't think that they're all powerful. It is inevitable, though, that their act would enter the American psyche very importantly. And there's no avoiding that.

**MOYERS:** What do you do every day to live with and under this cloud of dread, this death that infiltrates our psyche whether it's the sniper in Washington or the explosion in Bali or the coming war with Iraq? What do you do to get through the day?

**ROBERT JAY LIFTON:** You know, I think we all...we have a double life. On the one hand we know that we can be annihilated and everybody around us by terrorism, by the incredible weaponry that this world now has.

And yet in another part of our mind we simply go through our routine. And we do what we do in life, and we try to do it as well as we can.

Perhaps I do the same. I have perhaps more exposure to these Draconian events because I'm concerned about them professionally and also as an activist in trying to combat them.

At the same time, I try to round out my life with love in my family and my children and grandchildren, my wife. And to live a life that's free of these events, but doesn't deny them.

**MOYERS:** Free but never unmindful of them.

**ROBERT JAY LIFTON:** No. Never unmindful of them.

**MOYERS:** When I interviewed you a year ago, we ended that conversation, when I said, what should one do today? What should we do in the aftermath in 9/11? And I remember what you said. You said, become political. Get involved in something that matters. Do you remember that?

**ROBERT JAY LIFTON:** I do, and I would repeat it now in a different way. Whatever we do, we can relate to this. You know, if we're students, or teachers, or if we're writers, or if we're workers of some kind. We can relate what we do in life to what's happening in the world, and we can take a stand that's informed by our own experience in what we do.

So I don't think we should just forget about our ordinary routine; I think we should bring in our knowledge and experience in opposing war making and violence.

**MOYERS:** Thank you very much, Robert J. Lifton.

**ROBERT JAY LIFTON:** Thank you.

**ANNOUNCER:** Next week on NOW, Saudi Arabia: Is our closest Arab ally helping fund terrorism?

**MATTHEW LEVITT, FORMER FBI COUNTER-TERRORISM ANALYST:** Members of the royal family did in fact give substantial amounts of money to groups that have since been linked to international terrorism.

**ANNOUNCER:** The NEW YORK TIMES and NOW investigate Saudi money and the network of terror. Next week on NOW. Coming up on NPR radio....

**BOB EDWARDS:** I'm Bob Edwards. Join me on the radio for Morning Edition from NPR news.

On Monday, how Americans feel about war with Iraq now that Congress has authorized military action plus the origins of the Marlboro Man.

Find your local public radio station at [npr.org](http://npr.org).

**BILL MOYERS:** Recently, we've been listening to some voices with fresh ideas for the new century. Tonight, we want to introduce you to Monica Patton. We heard earlier from Chuck Lewis about people willing to spend fortunes on campaigns. Monica Patton is every bit as committed to the simple idea of getting people to vote. During the last midterm election, only a third or so of registered voters bothered to make their voices heard. But Monica Patton and an organization called Vote for America have shown you can do amazing things if you just won't take no for an answer.

**MONICA PATTON (SPEAKING AT VOLUNTEER TRAINING SESSION):** In 1996, for the first time ever in our country's history, less than 50% of the American population went to the polls, and the statistics are not encouraging experts predict that 2002 may have the lowest voter turnout ever, that we've ever seen.

**MONICA PATTON:** My name is Monica Patton, I'm the Executive Director of Vote for America Rhode Island. We're not about getting a particular candidate out or-- advocating on a particular issue. We're all just about getting people out to the polls.

**MONICA PATTON (SPEAKING AT VOLUNTEER TRAINING SESSION):** A lot of times when I do these. A lot of people say "everybody I know votes" Well, I am here to tell you that not everyone you know votes and you know some of them ..they're people you live with, worship with, they're people that you work with...

**MONICA PATTON:** Vote for America was established in 2000 to get more people to vote.

We looked at how bad the voter turn out rates were. We just thought it was shameful and wanted to do something to make it better, to make people aware of how important it is to participate.

**MONICA PATTON (SPEAKING AT VOLUNTEER TRAINING SESSION):** Just to give you a little background about myself. I never really cared about voting... really didn't see the relevance to my own life. Um I think I voted once by the time I was twenty-four..

**MONICA PATTON:** I was in the Peace Corp in West Africa, in a small country called Burkina Faso -- just north of Ivory Coast and Ghana.

I was pretty fortunate to be there during an election. And it really opened my eyes to how elections were different there then they were here. People couldn't criticize the government. A journalist was killed. My friends really had to be careful about what they said about the government because it could get them in trouble.

And it's just-- was really an eye opener for me about what the differences were, and what we had here, and how lucky we were here.

I think people don't feel like their vote matters. They get turned off by the negative ads. They get turned off by the partisan politics. we hear all about the bad apples, but we don't really hear about all the good apples.

**MONICA AT SCHOOL, TALKING TO CLASSROOM:** If you guys are gonna to go out into the community and talk to people about why voting matters, what are you gonna to tell them? What are some of the things that you think will make them want to go out and vote?

**STUDENT:** We should be able to ask them to vote so they can express our rights and our ideas.

**MONICA PATTON:** When we go into schools often times we'll ask the students, "How does government effect you?" A lot of students tell us that government doesn't affect them.

...Financial aid for college. Good, that's a big one government finances a lot of people's education..

And then we start talking to them about-- "Well what about financial aid, what about your schools, what about the roads, what about the taxes your parent's pay, what about the fact that there's an age limit on when you get your drivers license?" And that's really something that we try to bring back to people is that awareness of what that connection is

**STUDENT:** People continually complain about what's going on in the government and I think that they would complain less if they actually did vote they would have a less reason to complain because they're making a difference

**WALEED, VOTE FOR AMERICAN VOLUNTEER:** Salaam Aleikum...Aleikum Salaam...

**PERSIS STANTON, RESIDENT:** Come on in.

**MONICA PATTON:** We ask our volunteers to go out and talk to people they know, their friends, their family, their neighbors their co-workers. Research, really shows that people vote because somebody that they know and trusted talked to them about voting.

**WALEED, VOTE FOR AMERICAN VOLUNTEER:** All the people that are registered aren't voters, so it seems as though it would make sense to have some kind of process that followed up with people

**MONICA PATTON:** There's been a lot of focus over the past 10, 15 years on getting people registered. And so we looked at those numbers and said if registration rates are so high-- that means that it's not the registration rates that are preventing people from voting.

**WALEED:** So, ah, Sister Persis, can you take a moment to fill out the card, and I can uh..

**MONICA PATTON:** So our strategy is really person-to-person conversations with the people that you know and trust.

**PERSIS STANTON, RESIDENT:** Sometimes people have even said you know they hear the politicians arguing or disagreeing and then when it's time to vote, you know, they just... they don't want to be bothered with that.

**VICTORIA, VOTE FOR AMERICA VOLUNTEER:** What we're asking you guys to do is we want you to take a pledge that says you are going to vote on Nov 5th.

**MONICA PATTON:** Part of the pledge to vote campaign is that there's a sense of obligation they're gonna see you, they're gonna be around you, you know every day up till the election. The hope is that they're going to encourage you enough that you'll really take it seriously.

**VOTE FOR AMERICA VOLUNTEER:** Do you feel more comfortable talking about it like this and asking your friends for information than maybe adults or people in the school or..

**FRIEND/SORORITY SISTER:** Well, we're on the same level so you understand where we're coming from.

**JOE, VOTE FOR AMERICA VOLUNTEER:** It takes on average, five to ten minutes per pledge, it really does.

**MONICA PATTON:** We try to make our volunteer base as diverse as possible. So we have Republicans, Democrats, Greens, Independents. We have business people, we have-- we have moms, we have students.

**PASTOR JEFFERY WILLIAMS, VOTE FOR AMERICA VOLUNTEER:** If you don't vote, someone is voting for you -- can you imagine that? Someone is going to step in there, make a vote, that's going to govern your life. I've had enough of that, how about you?

**MONICA PATTON:** When we started doing this campaign in 2002 we thought it would be a lot easier than it was in 2000.

In the 2000 election we did have an army of about 1500 people on the ground, trying to get more people to vote. Rhode Island saw a 5.6 percent increase in overall voter turnout. And exit polls showed that there was a 41 percent increase in youth voter turnout, which was the highest in the country.

I really believe it was efforts like ours, and all of the other organizations that were participating that really had a dramatic effect on voter turnout in this state.

But what we're finding is that it's actually much more difficult to recruit this time.

**MONICA PATTON SPEAKING TO VOLUNTEERS:** I'm really proud to be here today. I think it's amazing that what we started in 2000 here in Rhode Island has now expanded to three states and it's because of the work of you and a lot of people like you in 2000, who went out, talked to their friends and family.

**MONICA PATTON:** I think the hardest part about my job is convincing people that this is important, they don't see the connection between the water that they're drinking and the government that sits in the State House or in the White House.

And that's what Vote for America is trying to do, is trying to eliminate that disconnect between government and daily life.

**MONICA PATTON SPEAKING TO VOLUNTEERS:** Vote for America is actually like the vote itself, alone it's hard to make a big difference, but together we can make a drastic impact on what happens in this state.

**MONICA PATTON:** I think about my friends in Burkina Faso a lot when I'm doing this work.

**MONICA PATTON SPEAKING TO VOLUNTEERS:** In the next four weeks please get everybody that you know to vote

**MONICA PATTON:** I know that if they were here they would vote in every single election, no matter how small. And so I do, I think about them a lot. And I talk about them a lot. And I really encourage people here to vote, because it's so many people around the world

are fighting for the rights that we have here, and we should take advantage of them.

**MOYERS:** Iraq is not Vietnam, but war is war. Some of you will recall that I was Press Secretary to Lyndon Johnson during the escalation of war in Vietnam. Like the White House today, we didn't talk very much about what the war would cost. Not in the beginning. We weren't sure, and we didn't really want to know too soon, anyway.

If we had to tell Congress and the public the true cost of the war, we were afraid of what it would do to the rest of the budget — the money for education, poverty, Medicare. In time, we had to figure it out and come clean. It wasn't the price tag that hurt as much as it was the body bag. The dead were coming back in such numbers that LBJ began to grow morose, and sometimes took to bed with the covers pulled above his eyes, as if he could avoid the ghosts of young men marching around in his head. I thought of this the other day, when President Bush spoke of the loss of American lives in Iraq. He said, "I'm the one who will have to look the mothers in the eye."

LBJ said almost the same thing. No president can help but think of the mothers, widows, and orphans.

Mr. Bush is amassing a mighty American armada in the Middle East - incredible firepower. He has to know that even a clean war — a war fought with laser beams, long range missiles, high flying bombers, and remote controls — can get down and dirty, especially for the other side.

We forget there are mothers on the other side. I've often wondered about the mothers of Vietnamese children like this one, burned by American napalm. Or Afghan mothers, whose children were smashed and broken by American bombs.

On the NBC Nightly News one evening I saw this exclusive report from Afghanistan — those little white lights are heat images of people on foot. They're about to be attacked.

That fellow running out in the open - were he and the people killed members of Al Qaeda, or just coming to worship?

We'll never know. But surely their mothers do. And there will be mothers like them in Iraq. Saddam won't mind - dead or alive; and we won't mind, either. The spoils of victory include amnesia.

Ah, the glories of war; the adrenaline that flows to men behind desks at the very thought of the armies that will march, the missiles that will fly, the ships that will sail, on their command. Our Secretary of Defense has a plaque on his desk that says, "Aggressive fighting for the right is the noblest sport the world affords." I don't think so.

To launch an armada against Hussein's own hostages, a people who have not fired a shot at us in anger, seems a crude and poor alternative to shrewd, disciplined diplomacy.

Don't get me wrong. Vietnam didn't make me a dove; it made me read the Constitution. That's all. Government's first obligation is to defend its citizens. There's nothing in the Constitution that says it's permissible for a great nation to go hunting for Hussein by killing the people he holds hostage, his own people, who have no choice in the matter, who have done us no harm.

Unprovoked, the noble sport of war becomes the murder of the innocent.

That's it for NOW. Thank you for joining us. I'm Bill Moyers.

 [print this page](#)

[E-mail this page to a friend](#)

[About](#) | [Feedback](#) | [Pledge](#)

© Public Affairs Television. All rights reserved.