

Claudia Lennhoff: Closing Remarks 2017

I hope you enjoyed the dinner, the awards presentation, and the slide show.

This is an amazing anniversary for us – 40 years.

I have a confession to make to y'all.

Our organization started planning for our 40th anniversary last spring – a year ago. We had some big plans, and we really wanted to celebrate throughout the year.

But then, last November – the national elections...

I woke up very early on November 9, and as soon as I knew the results of the presidency, the Senate, and the House, I knew that starting immediately, beyond serving our clients, we would have to dedicate all of our precious organizational resources to fighting to protect health care. And I knew that it was going to be an all-out fight and we would need all hands on deck, and we would have to abandon many of our plans to celebrate our 40th anniversary.

But I also knew, without a doubt, that it mattered greatly that our little organization, created in 1977, was still here.

As expected, the leadership of the House Republicans and President Trump are working hard to “repeal” the Affordable Care Act.

The monstrosity of a bill that they put forward – the American Health Care Act – is no “repeal and replace” bill. It is a devastating tax cut bill masquerading as a health care bill – and it doesn't only make the ACA a target; it also sets its sights on the Medicaid program. And not just the portion of Medicaid that was expanded under the ACA, but the entire Medicaid program.

That horrible bill was recently made even worse with the MacArthur Amendment. The amended bill was maybe going to be called for a vote yesterday, but the House Republicans realized that they did not have the votes. But stay tuned because there might be a vote next week.

Here is what the AHCA bill, including the MacArthur amendment does:

- Results in loss of health insurance for over 24 million
- Ends Medicaid expansion – 8.3 million lose coverage
- Slashes regular Medicaid by block granting or capping it and 3.6 million children, 720,000 disabled people, and 914,000 low income elderly would lose their coverage
- Increases the cost of coverage by thousands of dollars
- Marks up premiums for pre-existing conditions by thousands of dollars, returning us to a time when insurance was priced out of reach based on your health history
- Allows states to cut Essential Health Benefits such as maternity care, mental health, and prescription drug coverage; and by the way, allows the annual and lifetime cap to apply to those Essential Health Benefits

And all without the benefit of a CBO score, or public hearings, or in our legislative district – not even a Town Hall Meeting.

There is absolutely no health policy in this bill. There is no health policy goal that this bill would accomplish.

But here is what it would accomplish: It would provide billions of dollars in tax cuts for the extremely wealthy and for corporations.

Donald Trump and many House Republicans promised to repeal and replace the ACA by providing better cheaper health insurance with lower premiums and deductibles, while opposing every single mechanism to pay for it.

The jig is up! We know that what they are proposing to do would end Medicaid as we know it – that venerable program that has been around since 1965 – and would turn us back to a time when health insurance companies are no longer made to comply with basic national standards that define what a health insurance policy should look like. They want to take your health security away.

If health insurance were a car, they would be telling us we can all have cars, but they will be cheaper and better and we'll have more choice. But what we want and need are cars that are safe and that we can drive on the highways, and what they are offering us instead is the opportunity to buy lemons and golf carts that will never get us where we need to be.

That's not better! Of course it's not better! But they keep telling us it is and they keep foisting this horror of a bill on the American public. This bill is like a monster in a horror movie – every time you think it's dead, it twitches and moves and you have to deal with the horror of it coming back! Unbelievable.

But this is no joke, and we have to keep fighting!

And make no mistake – all the activism in this community and around the country is the only thing that is making a difference and protecting us. We can't stop!

This is our 40th anniversary, but we will spend it doing what we do – organizing and advocating; turning citizens into activists; fighting for justice.

No matter how long it takes, this is what we will have to do.

As we reflect on our 40th anniversary and all we have accomplished, and the work that is ahead of us, let us also take a moment to celebrate the 5th & Hill Neighborhood Rights Campaign.

This year marks the 10th anniversary of the 5th & Hill Campaign.

The residents of that neighborhood are still fighting to get all the toxic contamination from the old manufactured gas plant cleaned up, including the contamination that went into the Boneyard Creek.

They are in it for not matter how long it takes. They don't stop fighting, and neither should we – whether it's the struggle to clean up toxic contamination in a neighborhood, or the struggle to protect the Affordable Care Act and Medicaid, or any other struggle for justice.

Again, as I think of these anniversaries and the challenges we are facing now, I am reminded that it matters a great deal that all of us are here – activists and volunteers; organizations like ours and EverThrive and Shriver Center, providers like Carle, Presence Covenant, Promise Healthcare and Rosecrance; and principled and dedicated legislators like Sen. Bennett and Rep. Ammons. It matters that we are here.

It matters that we organize and advocate and pass legislation and create programs. It matters that we vote and we get others to vote and that we elect people who will represent our interests. And it matters that we nurture the victories we've won and we remain vigilant and ready to fight to protect the gains we have made – the gains that are in the public interest and serve the greater good.

And I want to tell you that I am hopeful.

I'm not naïve. These are dark times.

But as Eleanor Roosevelt said, "It is better to light a candle than to curse the darkness."

I do feel hopeful. I am here with you all, and today, here, this is where hope lives and the light shines – it lives with you, with us. We are lighting the candles that show us the path forward, the path to justice.

And when we get weary – and we do get weary and tired at times,
I want us to be bold and determined and courageous in these struggles.

I want us to be audacious and fierce and confident, and most of all, I want us to do the hard sustained work that it will take. We must not and cannot lose this fight – too many lives depend on it.

I have to share with you my favorite Molly Ivins quote, which seems more fitting than ever.

Molly Ivins said, "So keep fightin' for freedom and justice, beloveds, but don't you forget to have fun doin' it. Lord, let your laughter ring forth. Be outrageous, ridicule the fraidy-cats, rejoice in all the oddities that freedom can produce. And when you get through kickin' ass and celebratin' the sheer joy of a good fight, be sure to tell those who come after how much fun it was."

Now, as I'm wrapping up, I want to make a special appeal to those of you who can, to consider making a special contribution to our William Mueller Sustaining Fund – especially on this occasion of our 40th anniversary.

Bill loved CCHCC deeply and was always looking ahead and concerned about our financial future so we could be around for a long time to continue the work that matters. Please consider making a contribution in honor of Bill and in support of our organization.

And please continue to do all the things that you do, big and small, that help make our organization and our community better.

From the bottom of my heart, I thank all of you for your good works and for your support, and I look forward to the next 12 months, and many more years together, improving the health of our community! Thank you!