

Claudia Lennhoff, CCHCC Executive Director
Statement for Occupy C-U
Saturday, October 15, 2011

Good afternoon! My name is Claudia Lennhoff and I'm the Executive Director of the Champaign County Health Care Consumers.

We are here with y'all in celebration of this action to join with our brothers and sisters around the country, and around the world to stand in solidarity with the Occupy Wall Street protesters to say we want an end to corporate domination of our economy, our government, and our lives!

We are told over and over again by our leaders in Congress, and the media's shallow analysis that our nation's number one problem is the budget deficit, and that we have to balance the budget, or else.

I think we all know that the focus on the budget deficit is an organized scheme to shift the focus away from the real problems we are facing.

The real problem we face is not the budget deficit.

The real deficit is a deficit of jobs.

The real deficit is a deficit of fair wages, benefits and bargaining rights.

The real deficit is a deficit of health care for all.

The real deficit is a deficit of regulations to protect the public's health and interests, health and safety, economic rights and security, and the environment.

The real deficit is a deficit of a national ethic that prioritizes the greater good, the public interest, people above profits.

These are the real deficits.

When we fight and advocate for the greater good, for the kinds of changes that would protect all of us and give us a shot at a decent way of life, we are flooded with a pack of lies and justifications for why things are the way they are and why we can't change those things.

I want to take a moment to review some of these big lies and the truth, and then talk about our next steps for how we turn today's actions into a real and lasting movement.

The first lie is that:

1. Tax cuts for the rich trickle down to everyone else. Baloney.

Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush both sliced taxes on the rich and what happened? Most Americans' wages (*measured by the real median wage*) began flattening under Reagan and have dropped since George W. Bush. Trickle-down economics is a cruel joke.

We are also told that:

2. Higher taxes on the rich would hurt the economy and slow job growth. False.

From the end of World War II until 1981, the richest Americans faced a top marginal tax rate of 70 percent or above. Under Dwight Eisenhower it was 91 percent. Even after all deductions and credits, the top taxes on the very rich were far higher than they've been since. Yet the economy grew faster during those years than it has since. (*Don't believe small businesses would be hurt by a higher marginal tax; fewer than 2 percent of small business owners are in the highest tax bracket.*)

We are also told that:

3. Shrinking government generates more jobs. Wrong again.

It means fewer government workers - everyone from teachers, fire fighters, police officers, and social workers at the state and local levels to safety inspectors and military personnel at the federal. And fewer government contractors, who would employ fewer private-sector workers. In fact, the \$61 billion in spending cuts proposed by the House GOP will cost the economy 700,000 jobs this year and next.

We're lied to about the budget deficit. We are told that:

4. Cutting the budget deficit now is more important than boosting the economy. Untrue. With so many Americans out of work, budget cuts now will shrink the economy. They'll increase unemployment and reduce tax revenues. That will worsen the ratio of the debt to the total economy. The first priority must be getting jobs and growth back by boosting the economy. Only then, when jobs and growth are returning vigorously, should we turn to cutting the deficit.

We are also told that:

5. Medicare and Medicaid are the major drivers of budget deficits. Wrong. Medicare and Medicaid spending is rising quickly, to be sure. But that's because the nation's health-care costs are rising so fast. One of the best ways of slowing these costs is to use Medicare and Medicaid's bargaining power over drug companies and hospitals to reduce costs, and to move from a fee-for-service system to a fee-for-healthy outcomes system. And since Medicare has far lower administrative costs than private health insurers, we should make Medicare available to everyone.

And,

6. Social Security is a Ponzi scheme. Don't believe it. Social Security is solvent for the next 26 years. It could be solvent for the next century if we raised the ceiling on income subject to the Social Security payroll tax. That ceiling is now \$106,800.

And now, in a newly escalated and appalling form of vitriol, we are told that:

7. It's unfair that lower-income Americans don't pay income tax. Wrong. There's nothing unfair about it. Lower-income Americans pay out a larger share of their paychecks in payroll taxes, sales taxes, user fees, and tolls than everyone else.

We have to resist these lies and demand that these lies not provide the foundation for our nation's social and economic policies.

We do have to express ourselves, and we do have to educate ourselves and the public at large. But that alone will not be enough.

We didn't get here overnight, and we won't get out of this overnight. It will take time, hard work, dedication, discipline, organization and conviction. And it will require our unity in action.

This is a great event, a great protest, but we have to make sure that this is more than just an event – we have to make sure that it is a building block for a real organized, mass national movement that will work to change the conditions that put us in this situation.

Today, we have to make a commitment to continuing to build on this momentum, to coming up with specific demands and taking action on those demands to bring about the changes we want to see.

We have to make a commitment to being in this for the long haul – this struggle won't be easy. We are up against literally the most powerful interests in the world, and power concedes nothing without a demand. We have to make that demand. We have to have power behind our demand.

And our power is going to come from our numbers – from the thousands of people locally who respond to calls to action in unison with millions of other Americans around our country.

You've shown up today, and that is a great thing.

Now, to move us into building a movement, I want to ask you to take one more step today, while you are here. I want to ask you to please sign on to get involved for future actions, events, and to get information from Occupy CU.

We have sign-on sheets, clip boards – so we can stay in touch with you and take action together in the coming days, weeks, months and even years as we move this mountain to restore our democracy, our economy and our collective and individual futures.