

Claudia Lennhoff: Closing Remarks 2011

It really has been a great year, and I know I can speak for all staff and Board when I say that we feel very privileged and grateful to be able to work with all the wonderful people who are volunteers and members of our task forces. Without you, we couldn't do what we do.

Now, if you will indulge me, I'd like to say a few words about these troubled times we live in, and what we must do as justice-loving people.

This past year has been incredibly difficult – for individuals, and for our nation. People are hurting economically, and as the economics of our state and our nation suffer, so do the services on the ground, in our communities, that help people survive and heal from what ails them, and that help people work toward a better life for themselves and their families. These are truly hard times.

But even in the midst of these hard times, we who work for justice, we who work to make life better for all of us, we who work for the public good and in the public interest – I mean all of us – we have won victories and advanced our causes in so many ways.

But some people may on occasion feel discouraged and tired, as the victories have come with frequently shocking backlashes from those who have other deeply held interests, from those who work not for the public good, but for their private gain at the expense of others' ability to live decent, healthy and just lives; those who work not from a vision for a just society motivated by love and compassion, but from a sick and twisted desire for profit at all expense, or an undemocratic desire to impose an ideology that

devalues the public good and fails to recognize our interconnectedness.

The backlash from these forces has resulted in devastating outcomes – shocking Supreme Court decisions, attacks on venerable non-profit organizations, attacks on women’s health, attacks on labor unions and workers’ rights to bargain collectively, and vicious attacks on immigrant residents, just to name a few.

If you are not a youngster, surely you will feel like me at times, like, “wow, haven’t we been here before? Do we really have to fight this fight again? Still? Really?”

And the answer is, of course, yes.

We have to fight. We have to keep working. Because what we are fighting for – whether it’s health care access or environmental health, education, civil rights, disability rights (which are civil rights), or labor rights – we are fighting for justice. We are fighting for the people’s ability to have a better life, to reduce suffering. For life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

Imagine what our communities, our states, our nation, our world would be like if all people could have their basic needs met; if all people could realize their potentials? If people’s lives weren’t cut short or made miserable from lack of food, water, housing, health care, and all the other basics for which people struggle. Just imagine!

So, no matter how tired we are, how frustrated we are, we don’t have the luxury of getting burnt out or giving up. If we allow ourselves that indulgence, we lose hope, and then all is lost.

For Studs Terkel, the renowned oral historian, hope is born of activism, commitment, and the steely determination to resist.

In his book, "Hope Dies Last," Terkel writes the following:
"Hope has never trickled down. It has always sprung up. That's what Jessie de la Cruz meant when she said, "I feel there's gonna be a change, but we're the ones gonna do it, not the government. With us, there's a saying, 'La esperanza muere ultima.' Hope dies last.' You can't lose hope. If you lose hope, you lose everything."

And so, as Studs Terkel points out, we are battling the odds. Those who seek to take away the gains we have made in the pursuit of justice are powerful and they are motivated. The struggles we engage in are David and Goliath struggles, much like our own 5th & Hill Campaign.

And so, as Terkel says, we must become "like a legion of Davids, with all sorts of slingshots. It's not one slingshot that will do it. Nor will it happen at once. It's a long haul. It's step by step." The impossible will take a little while.

So, my brothers and sisters, the answer to what we must do is simple: We must not give up!

It is simple, but it is not easy.

It means that we cannot turn away from human suffering; we cannot abdicate responsibility to do what we can for others; and we cannot give up.

Tonight, what we are really celebrating is our collective commitment to not give up, no matter what. I am proud to walk the long haul with you, and to work with you for however long it

takes – you who are on the side of the angels. And I pledge to you that our work will continue to honor those angels who have been and are among us – John Lee Johnson, Bill Mueller, Bette Mueller, Alice Sharon Seay, Rev. Bob West, Sharon Bean, Marlowe Thorne, Lester Pritchard, Dave Anderson, Nick Skala, Lisa Busjahn, Bill Davis – and all the many more who have graced our lives and who continue to make it possible for us to not give up.

And now, a very special tribute to all our angels from our dear friend Jim Bean.

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Jim plays “Calling All Angels” (with “I won’t give up” refrain)

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● **Thank you, Jim.**

● **Before I close, I want to remind you about the William Mueller Sustaining Fund**

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 fight the struggles that matter. Please consider making a contribution in honor of Bill and in support of our organization.

On behalf of the Board and staff at Health Care Consumers, thank you so much for being here, and thank you for not giving up!

Let’s celebrate tonight; the struggles will be there tomorrow. Please stick around and hang out. Jim Bean has graciously agreed to keep playing and singing. The cash bar will stay open until 10 p.m. So we invite you to stay and socialize.

Thank you so much and have a great evening.