

My speech at the "Jobs Not Cuts" rally in Olympia, WA on October 15, 2011

My name is Gabi Clayton and I'm a self-employed person and a lifelong activist.

I was asked to talk about a part of my personal story and how it connects to why we are here today.

I'm self-employed.

I was lucky that a couple of years ago one of the amazing non-profit organizations I do web design work for got a grant and was able to bump me up to a 20 hour a week contract including health insurance.

That was really good because I'm getting older and I have diabetes and epilepsy, so I've got lots of medical bills.

The grant didn't get renewed last year, so I lost the insurance when my hours were cut in half.

I applied for the Washington Health Plan insurance which is for residents who are not eligible for Medicare, but I was turned down because I have too many illnesses. What?!

Now I'm "lucky" to be on COBRA health insurance – for which I pay \$548 a month. I can do that through March if I can pay for it, but then I'll be left without health insurance – again.

I've been self-employed most of my life. That means I don't count. I don't mean I'm not significant, I mean I don't count – I mean I'm not tallied when politicians and media folks talk about unemployment numbers at over nine percent. That doesn't include people like me because as a self-employed person I can't file for unemployment.

It's insane that this country doesn't have universal health insurance.

We have a lot of things to be here for today and it's important because the alternative is hopelessness and silence.

Leonard Peltier said:

“Silence, they say, is the voice of complicity.
But silence is impossible.
Silence screams.
Silence is a message,
just as doing nothing is an act.”

I say we won't all agree all the time, and we don't all focus on the same issues in our lives, but we can support each other in that journey to make things better for us as the 99% because we are a community that is willing to stand together.

I know the changes we are here for are not going to come fast and easy. This place we find ourselves in now is very frustrating and I worry about some of us deciding that the way to make change is to do acts of violence.

I'm a pacifist and I believe in non-violence as powerful action.

John Lennon said:

“When it gets down to having to use violence, then you are playing the system's game. The establishment will irritate you - pull your beard, flick your face - to make you fight.
Because once they've got you violent, then they know how to handle you.
The only thing they don't know how to handle is non-violence and humour.”

Jobs Not Cuts. Occupy Olympia.

It is powerful to speak the truth and be visible. I am grateful for the abundance of amazing people who are working for change here in Olympia, in my hometown of New York City, around our country and around our world.

I give you each the verbal gifts I wish for myself today – hope, humor, patience, and courage.

Thank you.