

Opportunity Wisconsin: Frontline healthcare worker in Wisconsin speak out about Trump Administration handling of pandemic and economic policies

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MADISON, Wis. — Today, ahead of Vice President Mike Pence’s visit to Wisconsin, [Opportunity Wisconsin interviewed Dr. Rachel Hughes](#), an Iowa County emergency medicine physician, about the Trump administration’s handling of COVID-19 and how economic policies championed by President Trump and his allies have exacerbated the pandemic’s impact on Wisconsinites.

When asked what message she would send to Vice President Pence, Dr. Hughes replied, “We are in this situation where our hospitals are struggling and our healthcare workers are struggling because we were not prepared...[There were] many warning signs that this was going to happen. This was not out of the blue, we had some time to prepare, and we really wasted that time.”

President Trump has prioritized the interests of the rich and powerful while in office. His tax cuts for the rich and corporations increased inequality and undermined broad-based prosperity. His Wall-Street friendly rules have encouraged corporations to take on destabilizing debt. And he’s refused to invest in public protections like healthcare and disease prevention. Now we’re seeing the results.

“Policies that don’t allow folks to build wealth and support families and help them grow, that comes back to hurt us when our society goes through a stressor like we are going through right now,” said Dr. Hughes.

Under the 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act championed by President Trump and his allies, [1 in 4 Wisconsinites will ultimately see a tax increase](#). By 2027, Wisconsinites with the lowest incomes are expected to pay more in taxes because of the 2017 tax law, while the wealthiest [1 percent of residents](#) will receive nearly \$8,000 in savings.

“There are some really basic principles that have been used in other countries to allow social mobility and how you best care for all of the people at the bottom, who are often working multiple jobs to make ends meet, to assure that they can make a better life for themselves and children,” said Dr. Hughes. “That includes supporting higher wages, family and parental leave, helping people pay for daycare, which are all things that are considered essential and part of the government’s responsibility in other countries.”

In the midst of a pandemic and economic crisis, President Trump slashed the safety net and tightened food stamp requirements, putting 700,000 people at risk of losing food support. He has proposed massive cuts to Social Security, Medicaid and Medicare, making it harder for Wisconsin’s poor and elderly to get necessary healthcare.

“People should never have to decide between their health or their rent and whether they can go to the grocery store this week,” said Dr. Hughes. “A lot of these frontline workers and a lot of Americans that are going to get sick from coronavirus are people who work in the gig economy or people who are owners of small businesses, or people who work hourly wages and may not qualify for benefits from their employer. And then of course when people have to take time off from work to take care of their own health or the health of their family members, they may lose some of those benefits.”

Wages have been stagnant in Wisconsin for decades — adjusted for inflation, the median wage in Wisconsin has only risen [73 cents](#) since 1979. Instead of giving hard-working Wisconsinites a boost, President Trump [blocked](#) a federal minimum wage increase, a move that denied more than 800,000 Badger State residents a pay increase and resulted in \$3 billion in lost wages.

Many of these same workers are now facing sky-high debts and are being forced to decide between daily necessities like food and medicine just to survive. In 2017, [22 percent of Wisconsin residents](#) stopped taking the prescription drugs they need because the costs were too high.

[WATCH THE FULL CONVERSATION HERE.](#)