

Opportunity Wisconsin: Milwaukee service industry won't make it through

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MILWAUKEE, Wis. — On Thursday evening, as U.S. jobless claims soared to 6.6 million and Wisconsin's unemployment rate was [on track](#) to reach record highs, [Opportunity Wisconsin](#) and the Progressive Restaurants and Activists of Wisconsin Network ([PRAWN](#)) hosted [a virtual conversation](#) aimed at elevating the stories of small business owners and displaced workers in the Milwaukee area service industry.

“A lot of people see our industry as unskilled and unimportant, but with the changes coming from COVID-19, we know that's not true. We are here to make sure that we are supporting our workers,” said Melissa Bucholz, PRAWN Executive Director, Opportunity Wisconsin Steering Committee Member, and [Odd Duck](#) owner.

According to [new data from Navigator Research](#), 71% say the economy is in bad shape, 59% know someone who's lost their job due to coronavirus, and by 13 points, Americans believe President Trump's economic response favors the wealthy and big corporations over middle and working class people (50-37%).

“We feel like we don't have protections from the federal government,” said Tony Marquez, Owner of [La Estacion](#) in Waukesha. “Big corporations have protections, and I hope that the federal government doesn't forget about us because we are a huge engine of this economy. I can't stress how scary this is – not knowing how we will pay for our restaurant, how we are going to pay our bills. I couldn't sleep.”

“Our business is down 70%. We are holding on, and I want to emphasise that we all did this without knowing that there would be any programs to help us, we did it

because it was the right thing to do,” said Bucholz. “Without significant access to programs, we won’t be able to rebuild, and so many others won’t make it through.”

The economic crisis sparked by COVID-19 has been fueled by years of President Trump’s economic policies that continue to this day. From the moment he took office, President Trump prioritized the interests of the wealthy and well-connected over those of workers and families — and now Wisconsinites are paying the price.

“We hear a lot about how businesses were going to get a big break with the 2017 tax cuts,” said Becky Cooper Clancy, [Bounce Milwaukee](#) Owner. “If there was a significant change in tax cuts, it wasn’t noticeable for us. When you see large corporations get a tax cut when they don’t even pay taxes at all, it’s really frustrating.”

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.

Wisconsinites are up against staggering unemployment, loss of health care, quarantine, and an infectious disease on the rise — corporate bailouts won’t pay our bills, protect our health, or put food on our tables. We need all the support we can get from lawmakers to ensure our financial security and health.

“Not only did I have my current job, but I also had a second job to make ends meet, to pay for student loans, and that was my fall back plan and that fell through too,” said Whitney Eagan, an Events Coordinator at a local Milwaukee hotel. “This is so out of our control. It’s nothing that any of us did wrong or a bad business decision anyone made. But in a matter of 24 hours everything that you were working for is just gone. That \$1,200 is not going to do too much in the sense of how many bills I’m going to have to pay still.”

As we fight our way out of the current crisis, policymakers need to focus on restructuring our economy in a way that rebalances power toward workers, provides security and stability to the most marginalized workers, and puts systems in place to ensure our economy works for all us — not just the wealthy and well-connected. The next wave of economic stimulus simply cannot be a massive giveaway to big corporations as millions of working people struggle.

“Small businesses are in a very unique situation and moving forward we are going to have to come together and protect ourselves, and hold the federal government accountable,” said Marquez.

About Opportunity Wisconsin

Opportunity Wisconsin is a coalition of Wisconsin residents fighting for an economy that works for working people. Through our stories, we’re elevating the real consequences of the destructive economic policies championed by President Trump and his allies these past three years, and showing how they have made Wisconsin’s economy worse off. Join us in demanding our elected officials focus more on growing the economy for middle class folks and expanding opportunity for all Wisconsinites, not just the wealthy few. To learn more about Opportunity Wisconsin, visit OpportunityWisconsin.org or stay connected on Twitter at [@OpportunityWI](https://twitter.com/OpportunityWI) and on Facebook at Facebook.com/OpportunityWI.

About PRAWN

The PRAWN (Progressive Restaurants and Activists of Wisconsin Network) follows in the success and tradition of national organizations such as [RAISE](https://RAISE.org) and [ROC United](https://ROCUnited.org) who advocate for the rights of restaurant employees. By focusing on both restaurants and consumers across Wisconsin, they fight for Wisconsin’s more than 200,000 restaurant employees by undoing some of the damage that the Wisconsin Restaurant Association has done to both service employees and the restaurant industry. To learn more, head to thePRAWN.org and follow them on Twitter at [@NotTheWRA](https://twitter.com/NotTheWRA) and Facebook at Facebook.com/NotTheWRA.