

Opportunity Wisconsin: Milwaukee small business owner says Trump's slow response to COVID-19 devastated our business

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MILWAUKEE, Wis. — Today, as Wisconsinites head into a holiday weekend with a patchwork of local public health orders and directives, [Opportunity Wisconsin interviewed two Milwaukee small business owners](#) about reopening the Badger State and the challenges of navigating the federal government's economic support during this global pandemic.

It's been 85 days since President Donald Trump said we'd soon have zero cases in the U.S. We now have 1,620,000 cases and 96,000 deaths - more deaths than any other country in the world. President Trump's chaotic response made this crisis worse, and his failure to act early on has also left 40 million unemployed. It didn't have to be this way. As [new models project](#) U.S. coronavirus deaths doubling in two months due to reopening, President Trump says he will not close the country if there is a second wave outbreak.

"The slow response by President Trump to COVID-19 devastated our business," said Melissa Buchholz, [PRAWN](#) executive director, Opportunity Wisconsin steering committee member, and [Odd Duck](#) owner. "It forced us into the role of public health official. If the people who have all of the information, all of the warnings, and all of the tools don't share those it's pretty hard to be left to make these decisions for yourself, for your livelihood, for your employees and for your guests."

When asked what she'd say to President Trump about his leadership and response during the coronavirus pandemic, Buchholz replied, "We're working really hard out

here. I don't know how you can ignore so many of us. We're looking to you for guidance, calm, and stabilization during this time, because that's what presidents are for."

Instead of working with Congress to pass the HEROES Act, which would provide additional relief for small business owners and the middle class, President Trump is trying to jam through a payroll tax cut, which would give wealthy corporations billions of dollars in tax breaks while a single parent earning \$25,000 a year would receive just \$500.

"Small businesses are the engine of our economy. I understand that large corporations are having difficulties too, but a payroll tax cut isn't going to address any of our issues as small business owners. It's not going to help our employees," said Cameron Roberts, co-owner of [LuLu Cafe](#). "It's a flagrant insult to working families, the middle class, and people struggling. There's all this lip service, 'I'm for working families,' but everyday you turn around and there's another obstacle put in their path."

Last week, Opportunity Wisconsin [sent a letter to Congressional leaders](#) demanding support for working Wisconsinites in the HEROES Act. The letter included a demand for "robust financial assistance for small businesses across the state struggling to make ends meet, in place of the mismanaged Paycheck Protection Program, which has failed to actually deliver relief to small businesses."

During today's conversation, both Buchholz and Roberts expressed frustration with the PPP application and implementation process, with Roberts saying, "Even our banks didn't know how to navigate it."

On Tuesday, Treasury Secretary Mnuchin's Senate testimony revealed how President Trump is putting Wall Street and massive corporations ahead of workers, reiterating that the Trump administration wants workers who don't want to return to work before it's safe [to be punished](#) by losing their unemployment benefits.

"There's a lack of consideration being given to the costs to go to work, such as single-parent families who don't have childcare because grandma is in a high-risk category," said Roberts. "It's so frustrating because it seems like our government refuses to recognize the struggles of actual working people."

[WATCH THE FULL CONVERSATION HERE.](#)