

Opportunity Wisconsin: Newly unemployed and furloughed Wisconsinites discuss concerns about soon-expiring pandemic unemployment assistance

Posted on Thursday, Jul 23, 2020

>> WisPolitics is now on the State Affairs network. Get custom keyword notifications, bill tracking and all WisPolitics content. [Get the app or access via desktop.](#)

MADISON, Wis. — Over the last three days, Opportunity Wisconsin has hosted a series of live conversations with furloughed Wisconsin workers to discuss the impending expiration of the Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) benefits created by the CARES Act. These benefits have provided support for about 700,000 unemployed Wisconsinites and served as a critical lifeline for millions more Americans out of work.

[Watch the full conversations here.](#)

Unless Trump and the Republican-controlled Senate take action before July 31, nearly 700,000 Wisconsinites will receive a \$2,400/month pay cut starting August 1. Over 25,000 Wisconsin residents have lost their jobs due to the coronavirus, and providing direct assistance to these workers should be the highest priority for the Trump administration. Instead, Republicans are focusing on providing more tax breaks to the wealthy and shielding corporations from liability if they refuse to protect their workers from the pandemic. It is clear that this administration is out of touch with working Wisconsinites' needs — in fact, the White House [confirmed](#) this week that the president does not support extending unemployment insurance.

During the series, a teacher, a barista, a county supervisor, a photographer, and operations director shared how their lives will be impacted if PUA aid is terminated

in just a few days.

Some highlights from the conversation:

“I just wish that people understood that we don’t have the resources on the ground — if we did, people could build and create things. We have this thing about resources ‘trickling down’ and that just doesn’t work,” said Kara Counnard, County Supervisor, wedding photographer and substitute teacher. “I am so worried. I keep thinking about how we really haven’t hit evictions and homelessness, and that’s coming next.”

“Come August 1, I do not know what is going to happen. I just lost a 2000 dollar job yesterday. We are just dumping water out of the boat to keep your afloat for a little while,” said Pete Olsen, a freelance photographer. “Trump’s response has been an abject failure. Trump contradicts his own experts. There is no question about it: Trump is more concerned about the stock market than individuals. What he relates to is big corporations and big money — he favors money over people or the states.”

“The extra \$600 helps a lot. This is the last week we get that extra \$600. We’re going to feel it without the extra \$600 a week,” said Marty Ybarra, Center Director for the Toman Youth and Learning Center. “I’ve worked hard all my life, and I’ve provided for my family and I want to continue to do that for them. I’m not asking for much. I just want what’s best for my children.”

“When I initially got my unemployment it took 7 weeks to get anything, and the major hold was for a determination for a job that I haven’t had in over a year,” said Sarah Johnson, a creative director. “I don’t know what to do. After that 7 weeks I did start getting unemployment but then the determination was readded to my account so then I didn’t get funds for another 6 weeks. I called and spoke with someone and basically the answer was keep applying and be patient. I was told to be patient a lot but 7 weeks is a long time without any income. The system is outdated, nothing that has been put in place was set up for a pandemic like what we are going through.”

“Before the pandemic we were almost always able to save a little money at the end of the month and we’ve been planning on buying a house. After the pandemic I was worried about if we’d have to lose our savings,” said Liz Carey, a barista. “We were fortunate to receive unemployment and not have to completely drain our savings. The base unemployment insurance without the \$600 would have left us scraping by

and probably having to drain our savings. Having that extra \$600 a month gave us the peace of mind that we'd be able to get through this without having to declare bankruptcy or rack up our credit card bills. I had surgery in May and we wouldn't have been able to pay for that without the extra assistance."