

Opportunity Wisconsin: Parents speak out about the destructive impact of COVID-19 and President Trump's economic policies

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EAU CLAIRE, Wis. — On Wednesday evening, [Opportunity Wisconsin](#) and [9to5 Wisconsin](#) hosted a group of middle- and working-class parents from all across Wisconsin for a virtual roundtable to discuss the challenges they are facing during the coronavirus pandemic and how the Trump administration's economic policies haven't worked for their families or communities.

"It's 24/7. You have a 4-year-old yelling at you, and you can't take a break. You can't take them to a grandparent's or relative's. It's a weird way to live right now," said Jyllian Grady, a single mom and service industry worker from Eau Claire. "I have to pay for rent and daycare, but unemployment and the stimulus payment does not cover a whole month and I have no income. I don't want to lose the spot for my son's daycare, but I have so many other things that I have to pay for and I can't cover all of it."

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 health care and disease prevention. Now we're seeing the results.

"I've now had seven family members, including my sister, who have had COVID-19. You think it's okay, but every time the phone rings you just hope it's not someone else who died," said Dr. Selika Ducksworth-Lawton, a professor and Eau Claire

resident.

“People are one paycheck away from not having anything. We knew this was going to happen. This isn’t a shocker to anybody who works in health care. Nobody listened to us. As a health care worker the most frustrating thing is that nobody is listening to us,” said Sara Thielen, RN, of Eau Claire.

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.

“The minimum wage really hasn’t changed in a long time. When we look at how people have been prepared, most people aren’t because they’re living paycheck to paycheck. Unless trickle-down economics have worked for you, you don’t have a massive savings account to be able to sustain when things like this happen,” said Kim Cronk, RN, Eau Claire County Board Supervisor, and single mom. “When we see these massive corporations that are giving this (Paycheck Protection Program) money back – the money wasn’t meant for them in the first place.”

“It’s the small businesses that are really providing most of the jobs, said Dr. Ducksworth-Lawton. “It feels like a system that is just created to mess with people. It doesn’t listen to the people and it gives money to the wrong people. We need to give money to small businesses.”

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.

“Most people are just trying to play catch up and are still not caught up. If they reopen the country before it is ready and the economy is already crashing, I can see

more alcoholism, crime, and suicide – and mom and pop places are closing and they can't rebound,” said Nancy Yarbrough, a nonprofit executive in Milwaukee.

Gina Monroe, a public school teacher and small business owner from Bayfield, echoed these sentiments, “Nancy, hearing you say that – you being down in Milwaukee and me being up here in rural Wisconsin – it really resonates, because it's exactly the same. We're on two different ends of the state, but it's exactly the same...We now have kids going to school virtually. That doesn't mean that parents have had any of their other stressors subside. Now they have financial stress and stress about whether their kids are going to be on track.”

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 health care.

“The most important thing a nation does is take care of its people, everything else is secondary,” said Dr. Ducksworth-Lawton. “We need to think as a people about how we return more of our power to the local and think of how we get these people to listen to us. Right now, it doesn't feel like anybody is listening to people at the bottom.”

“We ask ourselves as a nation, as a community, as a people – how do we emerge a more equitable and just society? But we have a leader who has no concept of national interest apart from personal interest...How do we emerge a more equitable society, because that certainly wasn't the case before COVID-19,” said Monroe.

[WATCH/DOWNLOAD THE FULL CONVERSATION HERE.](#)

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.