

Opportunity Wisconsin: U.S. Sen. Baldwin to Steering Committee: “It didn’t have to be this way”

Posted on Friday, Oct 2, 2020

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On eve of jobs report showing a slowing recovery, group gathers to discuss state of Wisconsin’s economy under President Trump

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MADISON, Wis.—Last night, shortly before President Trump would reveal his positive COVID-19 diagnosis, Opportunity Wisconsin convened its [steering committee](#) for [a timely and sobering discussion with U.S. Senator Tammy Baldwin](#). While the participants represented a diverse cross section of lived experiences in the Badger State, there was a common thread in the conversation: President Trump’s failure to lead during this crisis has exacerbated the struggles so many Wisconsinites were already facing due to his damaging economic agenda.

“You can’t just look at the stock market and say our economy is performing well,” said Senator Baldwin ([9:58](#)). “You can’t just look at job numbers before the pandemic and say that the economy is doing well. You have to see whether the economy is lifting people into the middle class. Whether they have jobs that support themselves and their families.”

President Trump’s economic policies have actively hurt Wisconsin by putting billionaires and big corporations first, and leaving working and middle-class people behind. Between rising housing costs, wages not keeping up with the cost of living, and nearly non-existent benefits, many in the Badger State are just barely getting by.

“All of his policies, even through some decisions around health care, tax policies, all of these decisions have made it harder for people in rural places, people who are lower-income, people who make less money, working-class, to be able to afford anything. I can’t think of a single policy actually that has been helpful for small businesses,” said Anna Landmark ([35:41](#)), Landmark Creamery co-owner and cheesemaker.

During the second year in a row that President Trump paid only \$750 in federal income taxes, he signed into law the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act which by 2027 will give 83% of the benefits to the top 1%. In Wisconsin, residents with the lowest incomes are expected to pay more in taxes because of the Trump Tax, while the wealthiest 1% of residents can expect almost [\\$8,000](#) in savings.

“We don’t give two hoots about what Wall Street’s doing. We’re not investing in that. We’re trying to pay our rent, we’re trying to pay for food,” said Kyra Swenson ([46:54](#)), an early childhood educator from Madison.

Last night’s conversation took place against the backdrop of another record-setting day of COVID-19 cases and deaths in the state of Wisconsin. Dr. Rachel Hughes, an emergency physician in Dane and Iowa counties, shed some light on one of the reasons the United States was not prepared to handle the pandemic ([21:16](#)), “The problem is that we had a public health infrastructure that had been underfunded for years and had suffered pretty drastic cuts and a focus on health care profitability, particularly under conservative administrations and under the Trump administration. As a result, the hospitals were not set up to be engines of public health, which is what they need to be in a pandemic. Instead, they are profit-making healthcare centers focused on the procedures and surgeries that are compensated the highest, not on primary care and public health infrastructure.”

Unknowingly painting a contrast with the kind of health care and benefits President Trump will receive during his recovery from COVID-19, Dr. Hughes continued ([24:46](#)), “The vast majority of Wisconsinites cannot take two weeks off of work and still pay their bills...Having no structured paid leave in this country for the vast majority of Americans, you can’t deal with a pandemic like this and appropriately control it if people can’t act in their best interest and stay home.”

On Friday, the U.S. Department of Labor released their jobs report showing nonfarm payrolls rose by 661,000, which was lower than expected and signals a slowdown in the country’s recovery.

“Here we are now in September and October and things are continuing to stay the same – we’re not back to business as usual and we’re not going to get back to business as usual before the end of the year and there has, from the administration, been no real response to what that will look like,” said Becca Cooke ([28:41](#)), Eau Claire entrepreneur and Executive Director of Red Letter Grant.

The [Opportunity Wisconsin steering committee](#) is made up of a diverse group of leaders who span the urban/rural divide and live and work in communities and industries through Wisconsin. Each of these leaders represents so many unique voices across our state. From ranchers and cheesemakers to restaurant owners and elected officials, the Opportunity Wisconsin steering committee reflects the values, the tenacity and the passion that makes Wisconsin so special.