

Opportunity Wisconsin: Wisconsin's American Indian and Tribal communities speak out on COVID-19's devastating impact

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MADISON, Wis. — On Wednesday evening, ahead of [today's weekly jobs report](#) indicating more than 40 million Americans have filed unemployment insurance claims over the past 10 weeks, [Opportunity Wisconsin](#), [Protect Our Care Wisconsin](#), and [Health Care Voter](#) hosted a virtual roundtable with members of Wisconsin's American Indian nations and tribal communities to discuss the challenges they are facing during COVID-19 and how the Trump administration's policies haven't worked for them, their families, or their communities.

"COVID-19 has just made us more aware of the equity issues that existed in the first place," said Dr. Marcus Lewis of Black River Falls and Director of Higher Education with the Ho-Chunk Nation. "The economic impacts for the Ho-Chunk Nation have been significant. The ripples will be felt for years after this. The conversation really needs to be about rebuilding our systems and structures."

The Trump administration's response to the coronavirus pandemic for Native communities has been slow. Under the \$2 trillion CARES Act, tribal governments were set to receive \$8 billion to respond to the public health crisis by the end of April, but tribal leaders say they have yet to receive any of the money.

"COVID-19 has closed our major source of revenue. We applied for the PPP [Paycheck Protection Program] in the first round and were not successful, but we

finally were in the second round,” said Curt Basina, member of the Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa and owner of [Copper Crow Distillery](#). “We need more direction on how the PPP can be utilized and we should extend the deadline from 8 weeks to 6 months to give the recipients the opportunity to use those funds without it turning into a loan.”

Earlier this month, 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.”

“When the federal government doesn’t make good on something, or the CARES Act funding is delayed, or there are barriers to access – that’s not a big surprise,” said Chris Munson, a member of the Oneida Nation and Diversity Specialist with Northcentral Technical College. “I have an awful lot of respect for what sovereign nations are doing to protect their people.”

Instead of working with Congress to pass the HEROES Act, which would provide additional relief for Wisconsinites most impacted by this crisis, 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.

“People are floundering around looking for leadership and we have none,” said Tena Quackenbush, Founder and CEO of Stop the Stigma of Addiction and member of the Ho-Chunk Nation.

The Trump administration has also failed to protect the health of tribal communities. Even before COVID-19, the Indian Health Service (IHS) was incredibly underfunded. A [report by the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights stated](#), “In 2017, IHS health care expenditures per person were \$3,332, compared to \$9,207 for federal health care spending nationwide.” To make matters worse, the CARES Act provided less than Indian Country requested to address coronavirus-related healthcare needs.

“We see non-Native tourists and visitors coming here, who can afford good healthcare and fly in to Madeline Island with their family,” said Paul DeMain, a member of the Oneida Nation, residing at Lac Courte Oreilles, and CEO of IndianCountryTV.com. “And if someone gets sick they can fly them to Mayo Clinic. They can afford to isolate. They’re coming into our community and acting like for some reason that they have the privilege to not protect themselves or our community...We’re a community in crisis that’s very vulnerable.”

“Even when we do have a vaccine – will Native communities get it? Who is going to get it first?” said Lewis. “We have to start thinking about access. If we’re waiting for the federal government to come and save the day – when has that worked out for us? We have to rely on each other. We’re still here, for a reason.”

“There’s an Oneida philosophy – we’re making decisions now, for generations into the future. We’re making decisions right now that impact our children’s children’s children’s children. It’s important for us to be thinking about how we’re building our resilience and making things better for the future,” said Munson.

[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.

About Protect Our Care

Protect Our Care is leading the fight against efforts to repeal and sabotage the Affordable Care Act while promoting access to quality, affordable coverage for all

Americans.

About Health Care Voter

[Health Care Voter](#) is a nationwide campaign to mobilize people from across the country to hold President Trump and Republicans in Congress accountable for their efforts to repeal and sabotage the Affordable Care Act (ACA). Americans' [top issue is health care](#), but since the beginning of Trump's presidency, the White House and a majority of Congressional Republicans have voted to strip health care away from millions of people. As a coalition of more than 40 progressive groups and grassroots organizations, Health Care Voters are fighting back to protect our health care and lower prescription drug prices. Additional Resources: Website: healthcarevoter.org; Facebook: facebook.com/healthcarevoter; Twitter: twitter.com/HealthCareVoter

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