TRUMP, WISCONSIN, & COVID-19
August 2020

Since the beginning of the pandemic, President Trump has downplayed the threat of the virus, declined to listen to experts, and refused to take action to protect Americans from the health and economic toll of the outbreak. In states like Wisconsin, his failures have exacerbated the consequences of the crisis.

QUICK LOOK:
- President Trump's failure to shore up supplies of personal protective equipment early in the pandemic left hospitals and care facilities with inadequate resources to battle the outbreak.
- President Trump's refusal to centralize testing has created persistent shortages of reagents, swabs, and kits across the state — making it impossible to identify and contain positive cases.
- President Trump allowed the virus to get out of control, triggering major economic consequences for states on shoestring budgets. Governor Tony Evers has already been forced to cut more than $300 million in spending — and now, President Trump wants to shift responsibility for enhanced unemployment benefits back to states dealing with major deficits.
- As President Trump allowed federal social distancing guidelines to expire and urged states to reopen prematurely, the conservative majority on Wisconsin's Supreme Court overturned Governor Evers' extended stay-at-home order — allowing businesses to reopen before it was safe to do so.
- In playing down the virus early on, President Trump put seniors in Wisconsin's long-term care facilities at risk. Deaths in long-term care facilities currently account for 38% of the state's total COVID-19 death toll.
- President Trump failed to protect workers in food plants in Wisconsin, instead mandating that plants remain open and providing liability protections for corporations instead of PPE for workers.
- At every turn, Republicans in Wisconsin have blocked and thwarted Governor Evers' efforts to keep Wisconsinites safe: they have fought in court to overturn the state's stay at home order, blocked access to Medicaid for thousands of low-income Wisconsinites, attacked Governor Evers' mask order, and forced Wisconsin voters to gather at the polls amid a pandemic.

CASES & DEATHS HAVE SKYROCKETED
- As of August 16, 65,741 people had tested positive for coronavirus in Wisconsin.
- On August 8, Wisconsin reported 1,165 new infections — its highest single-day increase in coronavirus cases since the pandemic began.
- On August 13, Wisconsin reported 943 new cases and a test positivity rate of 7.6%, putting "the 14-day trend back on an upward trajectory."
- More than 1000 people have died in Wisconsin since the pandemic began.
- On May 15, when the Wisconsin Supreme Court overturned Governor Evers' stay-at-home order, Wisconsin had 445 deaths from the virus. As of August 16, that number is 1,039.

HEALTH CARE UNDER ATTACK
- Wisconsin's Republican state legislature continues to block Medicaid expansion across the state — even as Governor Evers calls for the expansion to protect Wisconsinites from COVID-19.
- President Trump's ongoing lawsuit against the ACA would prevent Wisconsin from expanding coverage to thousands of people during this crisis.

TESTING DISASTER
- Wisconsin is still experiencing shortages of testing supplies — reportedly as a result of the federal government diverting supplies to other states.
  - Due to the shortage of supplies, at least six testing sites in Wisconsin are temporarily suspending operations.

- On August 11, US Senator Tammy Baldwin (D-WI) sent a letter to Vice President Mike Pence expressing "deep concerns about our **ongoing testing supply shortages and the reported diversion of supplies from Wisconsin**" even as the White House's coronavirus taskforce labeled Wisconsin a 'hot spot.'
- Wisconsin struggled with testing supply shortages from March to May — following President Trump's failure to centralize testing early in the pandemic.

ONGOING PPE SHORTAGES
- President Trump's failure to employ the Defense Production Act exacerbated acute supply shortages in Wisconsin at the beginning of the pandemic.
- Rather than establish a centralized manufacturing and supply distribution chain to get PPE to care providers across the country, President Trump allowed states to engage in bidding wars — privileging wealthier states and larger hospitals over poorer, smaller medical facilities.
- In April, more than half of Wisconsin's 133 hospitals reported having less than one week's supply of protective goggles and gowns. One third of hospitals reported less than a week's supply of N95 masks and paper face shields.
- In late July, Nursing homes in Wisconsin were among those to receive faulty PPE from the Trump administration. St Paul's Elder Services, for example, received 100 gowns without armholes in lieu of standard isolation gowns.

LONG TERM CARE FACILITIES UNDER SIEGE
- Rather than inform nursing homes and long-term care facilities of how to protect their residents, President Trump downplayed the virus from the outset.
  - Sondra Norder of St. Paul's Elder Services heard "little from the federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services about what they should do to start protecting their residents and staff. " Norder said: **"The idea that anyone besides (employees) would be credited for saving lives in long-term care at this point — it doesn't sit well with me… The bottom line is we started activating our emergency plans as (the president) was downplaying it."**
- By mid-June, one in four nursing homes in Wisconsin had reported a case of COVID-19 among staff or residents.
- In July, following President Trump's urgence to reopen state economies, Wisconsin began to see cases in long-term care facilities tick upwards as a result of community spread.
- As of August 13, 391 Wisconsinites had died in long-term care facilities — 38% of Wisconsin's COVID-19 deaths overall.

FOOD PLANTS UNDER FIRE
- President Trump declined to take action early on to protect essential workers in food processing facilities. As the virus ripped through plants, the government ignored warnings from workers and advocates.
- In Cudahy, Wisconsin, Smithfield foods took at least two weeks after its first reported case of COVID-19 in March to adopt safeguards. Some employees tried to wear their own masks, but were ordered not to use them. By May, 86 workers had tested positive.
- When the virus was spreading in facilities in March and April, the US Occupational Safety and Health Administration declined to inspect plants, instead sending "a brief letter that included tips on how to combat 'influenza-like viruses.'" As of late July, OSHA had not cited any food plants, in Wisconsin or elsewhere, for COVID-19 safety violations.
- The CDC did not issue guidance for meat plants until April 26, a full month after the industry first began to experience outbreaks. Some workers reported working side by side, without protection, for more than a month afterwards.
  - Shortages of PPE and President Trump's failure to shore up supplies meant that even after CDC revised its guidance, plants struggled to procure equipment for their workforces.
- As workers in meat plants across the country fell ill with the virus, President Trump in late April used the powers of the Defense Production Act to force plants to stay open — without also taking steps to protect workers.
- Mayor Eric Genrich of Green Bay (where nearly 500 meat packing workers then-had COVID-19) said of the order on May 1: "[President Trump]'s turning his back on reality and he's turning his back on the workers who live this

reality every single day… **In my opinion what this President has done, giving meat packing conglomerates legal carte blanche in the middle of a pandemic is reprehensible and indefensible… It's reckless and it's dangerous and it speaks to this President's complete and total inability to relate to or care about regular people here in Green Bay.**"

- As of July 31, more than 1500 food workers from 83 facilities across Wisconsin had tested positive for the virus.

ECONOMY IN SHAMBLES

- As President Trump allowed the pandemic to get out of hand, unemployment in Wisconsin [spiked to](#) 13.6% in April. Between March and July alone, Wisconsin's Department of Workforce Development [received](#) 4.3 million weekly unemployment claims — far greater [than](#) 1.9 million in all of 2019. Steep unemployment [prompted](#) Governor Evers' first round of budget cuts, following a precipitous drop in state tax collections.
- After Republicans allowed enhanced unemployment benefits to expire, President Trump's executive order [to expand](#) partial aid asked states to shoulder a quarter of the cost — a burden for states like Wisconsin, which has already been [subject to](#) $300 million in state budget cuts.
  - Governor Evers said that President Trump's order "**only created more uncertainty and confusion for folks across our state** and our country that need help," and called on President Trump to reach a bipartisan deal with Congress.
  - Wisconsin Senate Minority Leader Janet Bewley [said of](#) the order: "**Once again, [Trump] wants to put the burden on already strapped state governments**," she said.
- Curt Witynski, Deputy Executive Director of the League of Wisconsin Municipalities, [said of](#) the state's financial situation: "The fiscal cliff Wisconsin state and local governments face is substantial… **Without robust and flexible federal aid** to offset these lost revenues and ensure that the state can continue to invest in local governments through critical programs like shared revenue, **municipalities will be forced to make significant budget cuts in 2021 and 2022**."

RUSHED REOPENING AGAINST THE WISHES OF EXPERTS, GOV. EVERS

- On May 13, Wisconsin's majority-conservative Supreme Court [struck down](#) Governor Tony Evers stay-at-home order, allowing businesses across the state to reopen. The ruling came as President Trump [allowed](#) federal social distancing guidelines to expire on May 1.
- Just two weeks after the state was forced to reopen, Wisconsin saw cases [spike](#) and hospitalizations rise.
- Cumulative infections in Wisconsin are now nearly six times greater than at the point of its hasty reopening just three months ago — while deaths have more than doubled.

MASK MANDATE UNDER ATTACK

- President Trump has routinely [ridiculed](#) masks and [refuses](#) to implement a nationwide mask mandate — despite that research [suggests](#) masks could reduce transmission of the virus by as much as 80%.
- Republicans [have attacked](#) Governor Tony Evers' statewide mask mandate since its implementation on July 30 — But according to Rep. Adam Neylon, R-Pewaukee, they "don't have the votes to repeal the mask mandates."
- Despite that President Trump has ridiculed masks and that Wisconsin Republicans call Evers' mandate an "abuse of power," 69% of Wisconsin voters [favor](#) mandatory masks.

MAJOR RACIAL DISPARITIES

- President Trump's failure to contain the virus has disproportionately impacted Black people and people of color across the country, including in Wisconsin.
- Black Wisconsinites [make up](#) only 6% of the state's population, but 21% of the state's deaths due to COVID-19.
- Hispanic or Latino Wisconsinites [make up](#) only 7% of Wisconsin's population, but 25% of the state's cases.
- At the end of May, Wisconsin's COVID-19 death disparity [was the](#) third worst in the country.