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[00:00:29] **Speaker 1** Monday was Labor Day, and while most families use the holiday as a vacation, it's a good time to check in on the state of the average worker. And for that, we turn to Laura Dresser, Associate Director of UW-Madison's High Road Strategy Center, and the author of The State of Working Wisconsin Report. Thanks for being here.

[00:00:45] **Speaker 2** I'm so glad to be here, thank you.

[00:00:46] **Speaker 1** So your most recent report says the median wage has reached an all time high of $25 an hour, but obviously federal policies are creating some chaos as you say in the most recent jobs report shows that it's not looking good sometimes. Yeah.

[00:00:58] **Speaker 2** Yeah, that's right. It's a very there was there's been a very strong recovery from the pandemic shutdowns five years ago, but we were really beginning to see, especially in those monthly job numbers, troubling signs about the economy because I think of the federal uncertainty tariffs and immigration policies.

[00:01:16] **Speaker 1** So the numbers show that June was revised down to nothing, and very low anemic job reports since then, right?

[00:01:23] **Speaker 2** Yeah, the 2025 job growth month over month is and revised down like you said to a negative in June, a week, a week July. Those numbers are running less than half the 2024 jobs production numbers. So this is substantial cooling, a really troubling sign in the labor market, both at the national level and most of that showing up in Wisconsin too.

[00:01:49] **Speaker 1** So for a few months this year, it felt like we couldn't figure out what tariffs were actually in place or just being threatened. They were always on pause or hold. Can we relate some of the slowdowns to tariffs? Are those already being felt?

[00:02:00] **Speaker 2** I mean, there's two aspects to what's going on with tariffs right now. There's a lot of uncertainty. Like you said, it's hard to tell. And I think it's for businesses, domestic businesses and international businesses to plan when the regime is not clear, when what is our tariff policy gonna be? Still emerging, chaotic, giant leaps. So, partly the uncertainty cools off business investment decisions, puts people back on their heels at producer levels. And then also when the tariffs land and they're beginning to land, they increase prices. They do. They're a tax on imported goods. And that means imported and the domestic goods in those markets, the prices will go up. And so I think there's real concerns, I think some signs the tariffs are beginning to hit, but more like. Concern and the uncertainty really dominating the news right now

[00:02:52] **Speaker 1** So the Pew Research Center recently estimated the number of immigrants in the workforce went down by 1.2 million nationally in just the first six months of the year. What impact does that have on the workforce? We saw unemployment tick up as well.

[00:03:06] **Speaker 2** Yeah, I think what we see a cooling labor market, but we also know that especially in specific industries and some very important industries in Wisconsin, agriculture, hotels, food service. Immigrants are a big construction. Immigants are a share of the workforce, and the fact that they are often staying home or nervous or not coming to the country, again, this tightens the ability of businesses to grow and is another kind of wet blanket on the economy.

[00:03:36] **Speaker 1** We've only got a few seconds left, but historically, fewer workers typically means rising wages, competition from, will that happen this time?

[00:03:43] **Speaker 2** It may, I mean, there's a lot to see what washes out. We've got that kind of impact, although there's also, so yeah, we'll just have to wait and see. There's a a lot going on. Price changes because of tariffs. Labor impact demand because of the immigration systems and what's going on in the broader economy will probably dominate.

[00:04:03] **Speaker 1** And finally, just sorry over the last few seconds, union membership in Wisconsin's dropping Act 10, the Wisconsin Supreme Court's gonna take a look at it. Will we see a change if they overturn Act 10?

[00:04:13] **Speaker 2** These changes will be slow. I think it, unemployed, I'm sorry. Unionization rates fell in half from 2011 to 2024 in the state of Wisconsin. They won't double in a day or two. To get back to where we were, or even to get back to the national average will take years. But Act 10 and what we call, what is so-called right to work, you know, the policy around private sector unionization would have to go to get really large gains in the State as well.

[00:04:42] **Speaker 1** All right, Laura Dresser, thank you so much for your time. Thanks for having me. For more on this and other issues facing Wisconsin, visit our website at pbswisconsin.org and then click on the news tab. That is our program for tonight. I'm Zach Schultz, Federica will be back next week. Have a great weekend.