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Abstract:

Brent Lameyer is a recent graduate of the University of Eau Claire and currently resides in Duluth, Minnesota. During this interview, Brent discusses economic struggles he and his partner have faced as a result of the pandemic, the impact of COVID-19 on his personal life, the differences in responses between Minnesota and Wisconsin, and his thoughts on what needs to be done regarding the pandemic after the 2020 Presidential Election.

BLV: All right, it is currently November 30 7:15pm. Current COVID-19 stats for the United States are 13.6 million total cases, and 268,000 deaths. In Wisconsin is 409,000 total cases with 3496 total deaths. So, Brent, I'd like to ask you if you could give me some demographic information here, like, let's start; What's your full name? ethnicity, age and gender?

BL: All right. Well, I am Brent Lameyer, I am 23. I am white, is my race. Was that it?

BLV: Well, yep. We'll just keep moving along with that. So. Okay, well, where do you live?

BL: I live in Duluth, Minnesota currently.

BLV: Okay. And on a daily basis, what entails an average day? Do you work? Do you travel? Stuff like that?

BL: Currently, I am unemployed, I do not have a job. So mostly, mostly, my daily routine consists of just doing dishes around the house, cleaning the house, watching TV, playing video games and looking for jobs. That's really all my daily routine is... .

BLV: The struggle is real. I can understand that. So I guess we'll start at the beginning here. Where are you one COVID-19 hit the US when everything shut down? And what was your initial reaction to that?

BL: When it first happened, I was still in college at University of Wisconsin, Eau Claire. When was that around like, maybe February when we were finally first getting news about it? So my, I

guess initial reaction is just like, well, this doesn't look very good, and hopefully our country if we will probably get it, hopefully, we can actually get through it in a safe manner, but I was just kind of hopeful that we would all be okay and get through it. But well, it still hasn't ended yet. So hopefully, we'll see.

BLV: Yeah. So going off of that, what are some things that immediately change for you? You mentioned, you're a college student. So you were, I guess, what are some things that immediately changed for you in that field?

BL: In that regard, I remember being in class one day, and just students checking their phones and just being like, "Oh, hey, we're gonna be off of classes for like two weeks" for what was it at the time? Like, it was... Thanksgiving? No, spring was around, never mind, it was Spring Break. And so because of that, it was like, okay, that's cool. And then after that, it's just Nope, all online classes at that point. So basically, because of that, I never really went outside that much, since all my classes were all online, and I had to do all my work on my laptop. So there was never really much of a need to go outside at that point. So that really changed my daily routine.

BLV: All right, and then for the long run, what if some things have changed?

BL: For the long run, I haven't been able to really find a decent job in my field unless it's just like, generic sales calls, like just cold calling people something I really don't want to get into. But maybe I will, but that for the long run, it's just been hard getting a good job right now. At this point, I'll probably have to go into retail or something just to make some money. Other than that, I mean, long term, I guess not for me personally, but just the amount of people that died, and eventually my friends and family could be getting it at any times notice, which could potentially be drastic, since any one of them could die from it.

BLV: Yeah, me and my roommates here ourselves are struggling with at least a bit of a bug. I'm myself. I'm a little under the weather right now. So... Alright, so you mentioned since you've been in, you know, your college student at the University of Wisconsin, Eau Claire, right?

BL: Yep. that is correct.

BLV: Okay, so since you were in Eau Claire when the pandemic started, and now you live in Duluth, Minnesota?

BL: Yes, that is correct.

BLV: Okay. So what are some differences in terms of responses? COVID responses and attitudes with Eau Claire and Duluth?

BL: Well, obviously, since Eau Claire is in Wisconsin, Duluth is in Minnesota, you know, there's two different Governor's they're gonna give two different perspectives, two different ordinances for whatever the case, I think Minnesota is for the majority of it, I feel like have been a bit stricter, a bit tighter on trying to get people, of course, to wear masks and not going out and eating or partying. So it's a little bit more stricter, I believe, than Wisconsin. I know, Wisconsin did eventually get some ordinance. I don't know if they still have as much right now. But either way, I would definitely say Minnesota, definitely a bit more proactive in trying to stop the spread, whereas Wisconsin is a little bit more lax.

BLV: Has there... As far as you are aware, have there been any court battles in Minnesota, as there have been in Wisconsin over, you know, regulations enacted by governors?

BL: Any battles in court? None that I recall, I don't very often look at the news. So I they're, they're very much could be that I just don't know of but off the top of my head, I don't know of any.

BLV: Okay, and how would you say the attitudes of people living in Duluth are different from Eau Claire, like some age or demographic differences or going out to eat in a restaurant per se? How would... Are those attitudes similar to Eau Claire, or different? I'd like to hear your thoughts on that.

BL: I would say I think they're a bit different. They're still, I think there is a lot more people here who are taking it more seriously, they'll wear their masks inside. Or if they're around people outside, that kind of a thing. I feel like a lot more people in Eau Claire are like, "I don't want to wear a mask. I don't want to protect myself and others". But that's not to say in Duluth or in all of Minnesota. There's definitely still people here who also won't wear a mask or just won't follow ordinances, they'll still get together with people or they'll go to restaurants and bars whenever they feel like it just because they don't either care about it, or they just don't want to protect themselves or others, I guess.

BLV: So similar attitudes, kind of reflecting on how Minnesota is a little stricter than Wisconsin?

BL: Yeah. Yeah.

BLV: No, no Thirsty Thursdays... not as many Thirsty Thursdays on Water Street?

BL: I mean, I do my apartment complex lives above a restaurant and bar. So sometimes, it could get a little rowdy at some points, but...

BLV: Alright, so I guess I'll move on to some employment and education questions here. So you mentioned earlier that you, we talked a little bit about it, you transitioning online for your final semester of college, graduating, you did not get to participate in commencement, a lot of this stuff got cancelled. So I guess I'd like to hear your thoughts on what was it like transitioning online and graduating during the final semester?

BL: It was pretty odd to have everything online. I had taken I believe to online classes before then during the Winterim, the one term, like one month period, in the winter. So I was a little bit used to having online classes. But having like, I think I took five classes that last semester all five being online, was definitely a lot different and a lot weirder feeling especially not to walk to campus, or anything like that, and just sitting at the table on my computer just mostly all day doing work. So really odd. I would say I guess, weirdly enough, it benefited me because that semester I actually got on the Dean's list. So I don't know how that happened. That was the only time I ever got on the Dean's list in my whole five years at University of Wisconsin Eau-Claire. And there was even one other class I was very thankful to have it because we were going to have... like a we had to do a presentation that last two full 50 minute class periods and have activities for people to do and also talk about whatever topic we were talking about. But because of switching to online it became like one 50 minute long pre recorded video. So we could just record our parts and re-record them if we didn't like them, and I felt so much better about that, than having to fill up two full class periods with activities for the entire class. So it was in the short run, or to summarize that it was very awkward experience. But it was kind of nice a little bit for me personally.

BLV: Kind of made things easier because professors were scrambling just to move their entire curriculum online in like, a week.

BL: Yeah, exactly.

BLV: So and then you've graduated, moved to Duluth, And then how has like COVID and, you know, it changing the economy, how has that impacted your job search post graduation?

BL: Uh, it's impacted me because, well, I've had not great (an experience) at searching for jobs, it's been very minimal when it comes to trying to get something in my degree of marketing. There just really hasn't been stuff that are like, I would want to get something more behind the scenes rather than doing like, upfront sales with people. Because with me, I'm not much of a talker, especially when it comes to trying to sell something to someone. I'm not the greatest at it, so I've tried to avoid that. And even finding things in sales seems to be pretty slim, especially when we first moved here. It just wasn't going well. Otherwise, retail jobs, I mean, they're pretty

prevalent, especially with people quitting because they don't want to get the virus or anything. And you know, just so many companies needing more people, because of the demand of their businesses having to deal with being essential businesses, of course, and running during the pandemic.

BLV: Yeah, finding a job was, I mean, yeah, with the business major, too, it's got to make things a lot harder. So has the employment of anyone else you know been affected by the pandemic?

BL: It's kind of changed. I know, for my mother and my older brother, they both work at 3M. And of course, when pandemic hit for most people, they had to start working from home. Luckily, during this time, they have been able to keep their jobs, nothing has really changed about their jobs, they didn't get fired or laid off. So they just had to work from home. And my brother has pretty enjoyed it, he's enjoyed it a lot. I think my mother is doing all right. My father still asked to go into work, I believe, because he works at a bank, but as far as I know, I don't think his job has changed too much other than he sometimes goes out to restaurants with clients. And now of course, with the new ordinance and restaurants being closed to dine in, that's going to change a little bit. Other than that, my partner came here already with a job at Split Rock Lighthouse. I... besides how they did things, I believe that changed, but she was able to keep her job, she got it probably close to when the pandemic hit, she was able to keep that job all the way through. And now currently, they're on like their winter break, which lasts from like November to March, either March or February, which I believe is normal. I don't think that was a change with the pandemic. And so now she is just gonna, she's currently working at Target for like four months until she can go back to Split Rock Lighthouse when they open back up. So for me, I haven't noticed too much of a change with employment. But except for me, of course,

BLV: But thankfully, she was able to find... she was able to find a job with everything going on. That's... yeah, that's gotta be a blessing right there.

BL: Yeah, exactly.

BLV: I guess moving on here. How has some of your personal life been affected by COVID, such as like social interactions with friends and family to this?

BL: It's been impacted a bit in terms of my family. Besides them, having to help me and my partner move up here to Duluth, they came to help me with that. My brother and his wife are also going to help with that. But since that was in May, and the pandemic was still head started, and been going for a couple months, my brother was fairly afraid to go outside to come and help. So he and his wife did not come and help with moving which, I mean, I don't blame them. I completely understand that. No, no, no harm no foul to him. But I think since then, my parents have maybe come up here... once? Why I think one time and it was only for one day, because

they did not, they didn't really feel safe going into a hotel yet. So that's changed a bit. What we do in the meantime, though, we end up having game nights, usually weekly, virtually, of course. So that way, we can still talk to each other, see each other somewhat. That's nice. In terms of friends, we still talk with our friends through text chats, we get together to play games virtually. And so we probably if a pandemic still will, if it wasn't going on at this point, we probably wouldn't be seeing our friends as often, but er- probably the same amount that we normally are right now. We've seen them like twice. And so yeah, it's just yeah, in terms of my family, I probably would have seen them more often. If the pandemic wasn't going on in terms of my friends, It's been a little different, but mostly about the same.

BLV: And the pandemic kind of facilitated a lot of stuff, you know, moving online, I mean, you already did this before, but now, there's, I'd say greater public support, or there's a lot more people using it. So...

BL: Oh, yeah.

BLV: It's kind of getting that extra push. Like even this interview, I mentioned this in one of my other interviews, but even this interview, we're doing this online, we're not doing this in person, so it speaks to how all of this has moved a lot everything online. And going on that, what are some of the biggest challenges you faced as a result of the pandemic like economic or socially or, like something like that?

BL: Just for me personally, or the world itself?

BLV: You personally, I want to hear what you like, you know, stuff that affected you.

BL: I would say probably the biggest thing is just getting employment. Trying to find a job in my field has been so difficult, so tough. In terms of socially, it hasn't affected me too much. I mostly, whenever I had time off, whether it be from having employment or from school, I would usually just stay home, watch TV and play games anyways. So in terms of socially, it hasn't really affected me that much as I would have expected. But since I still talk with my friends and family, through text chats, and through video chats, or voice chats, whatever they may be, I still feel connected to people and still interact with them. So I feel fine, pretty much about that. I would just say the biggest thing is not being able to find employment.

BLV: And with, since you recently graduated, struggling finding employment, you recently moved to Duluth. How did the pandemic affect searching for a place to live, like, and moving to Minnesota?

BL: So I'm trying to... I believe we toured the place we went, we only toured the place we live in now. Luckily, we were able to get this place. I think it was close to the start of when COVID was starting to come to America, and really starting to be very prevalent across the country. I think it was in March, I want to say, so I think we were wearing masks. But there was some people who were some people who weren't, it wasn't really that big of a deal too much at the time. And so we were able to tour this place, we were able to just... Luckily, during our tour, we were able to like put in our notice of "Hey, we do want to rent this place" at the time of touring. So that ended up pretty well that we were able to get it before the pandemic really started to pick up and really started rolling and housing probably would have been very scarce and hard to find. We do have to pay a lot for this place. But at least we have a roof under our heads.

BLV: Yes. Honestly, like it's really nice that you can have it especially with what's You know, a lot of people are getting evicted right now. Housing has been a real struggle for a lot of people in America right now. So how would you say the people around you like your friends, family, how are they responding to the pandemic in terms of you know, masks or visiting or social distancing?

BL: I would say on like, the least of my friends and family group on the farthest end of the spectrum of being protected would be my older brother and my wife. My older brother, he, when the pandemic hit, I believe he was just very scared to even just go outside. And eventually he went to the doctor and he found out he had anxiety and now has to take anxiety medication. Because of this, I think he's feeling a bit better now, especially with medication and all that, but he's very much a, only wear masks, not gonna travel very often, except for like, essential needs. That's why he didn't help me and my partner move up. And I completely understand. With that, I think me, my partner, and my parents are pretty much on the same page. Like we'll go outside, we'll go shopping and get essentials or not essentials. I don't personally mind going shopping at places and not too worrying, I will wear my mask wherever and so will my parents they will wear masks. So they're pretty... They, they care about using their masks, they will do whatever it is that they want. They want to protect themselves as well, but they're not super on the side of like my brother and his wife and that really just almost not entirely never going outside. They'll go for walks but they're not... Oh sorry, I found my phone battery is dying.

BLV: Okay. If you wanna take a second, plug it in?

BL: Well, currently my headphones are plugged in, so...

BLV: Okay, so. Alright, we're gonna see how much we can get out of this then.

BL: I'm at 20%. So I mean, okay, hopefully, I can still go on for a little bit longer.

BLV: All right, so did I cut you off there? I'm sorry, did you have anything else to add to that?

BL: Um, no, that's pretty much it. It's just mostly everyone's pretty much being safe following the rules, maybe being a little lenient, but not by much.

BLV: Have you felt that like, anywhere, anyone around you, or people in Duluth aren't doing enough to like not taking enough prevention?

BL: I think they are doing pretty well. I think well, since I was last in Eau Claire. I think people in Duluth are doing a little bit better. Of course, again, like everywhere else in the US there's going to be people who are not gonna wear masks, who are going to defy any orders that Governor's put up or anything. And so I think it's a little bit better. It seems like at least the people in our apartment complex are a bit better. I usually see everyone wearing masks if they're inside, inside of here. And I don't normally see people not wearing masks, but I'm not out at all times. But that's what it seems to be for me.

BLV: All right. And you mentioned earlier that your brother has struggled with anxiety issues that resulted from the pandemic has... If you're comfortable with this, can you tell me if COVID-19 has impacted your mental health at all?

BL: Yeah, I can talk about that, um, I don't feel like it has, which, for me feels odd to say. Because I feel like maybe it should just since I'm home so much. But since, like I've said, In my free time, I really just play video games and watch TV, and that's just what I do to relax and I just, I enjoy being home and doing stuff I want. So I don't, I'm not one of those people who I feel like I'm trapped in my house. I don't feel like I can't get out because I really just enjoy being home. And I feel very relaxed when I am so personally I don't think it's affected me much.

BLV: You're surrounded by things that make you comfortable. I... Personally, I kind of envy you a little bit because I've... me still being a student, and that's, you know, this has affected me a little bit but... All right, moving on here. What are some of your biggest concerns regarding the epidemic in terms of the government, like the state government, your local government and the national government? You could just, you know, take time. Give me your thoughts on that.

BL: I would probably say with maybe local and state governments, I think they're doing the best they can right now putting up ordinances to not get people into, you know, large crowded spaces. I mean, because it's tough because you don't, you don't want to completely restrain people because people don't like to be constrained in any way, shape or form. But you also want to contain this, you'll want to put a stop to it, but just some people won't listen to what people say. So I feel like state and local government, they're doing okay. Hopefully, there won't be any types of protests or huge protests, I should say, like if they're doing it safely, go ahead. But I think

they're doing an alright job, as you can see right now. In terms of national government... Well, since we're heading into a new president, of course, it's going to be trying to get those gear change gears changed to a new presidency and the new task force and all that it's been a little bit tricky with the current president. But hopefully, once they're able to transition peacefully, and have a nice peaceful transition, we can hopefully, get going to have some other if there needs to be any other ordinances around the country that can help with stopping the virus from spreading, or just better leadership. Hopefully.

BLV: The... I'd say that the problem with some of those ordinances is that you need to enforce them. And sometimes the people who need to enforce them just won't enforce them.

BL: Yeah.

BLV: Those have been some of the struggles in Eau Claire. Personally, I felt. You mentioned earlier about protests here in Wisconsin, even in April, we had protests down the state capitol. Was there anything as far as, as far as you're aware, was there anything similar in Minnesota?

BL: In terms of things related to COVID? I don't believe so. I mean, there was, of course, the famous Minneapolis riots for Black Lives Matter. But that doesn't, as time matters, like I relate a ton to COVID. Rather, for a separate issue, of course, altogether. But as far as COVID goes, I have never... I have not heard of any protest relating to it. But there easily could have been, like I said, I don't follow news that heavily on a day to day basis.

BLV: Okay, and I was actually, that's what I was gonna move on to there. If you, you mentioned that you don't pay that much attention to the media. Where do you get most of your information regarding the pandemic like social media, or whatever news you do watch?

BL: Mostly, my main news source is just the basic news notifications and app on my iPhone. That's mostly where I get a lot of my news that's somewhat noteworthy. Other than that, maybe I'll see some, like COVID related articles. When I go to my, if I have looked at Google, sometimes they'll just give me some random articles that are based on my interest and about COVID. I'll maybe see some on social media, mostly Facebook, which I don't ever want to trust, of course. But other than that, those are I would probably say, my main three sources.

BLV: All right, so has that... has that media impacted how you view the pandemic at all?

BL: Yeah, a little bit, just to hear about like, I guess on like, different videos and social media about just, you know, kind of the new meme of Karens. Just people who just don't want to wear masks or blatantly defy the order they just don't care, and just well, I guess putting a bad light on

humanity, which I already kind of had a bad light on but it just kind of making things worse of all the terrible people that are out there right now just being assholes.

BLV: Yeah, I... there have been some there has been a lot of frustration. I mean, I've I understand your feelings. I've dealt with that even within some of my own family. So yeah, um so I guess moving on, we just the most recent election was this month, and who knows whenever that's gonna get sorted out. But we have a new president elect coming in, has COVID-19 impacted or changed or further influenced how you voted this election?

BL: Hmm. I feel like maybe it's changed a little bit. Like before the pandemic, I did not like Trump in any way. I didn't like his policies, I didn't like him as a person. So that didn't really change as much as my dislike for him. But looking at things on the pandemic started the Democratic Party had not chosen their candidate of Joe Biden yet, I believe. But once they kind of did, and once it was kind of getting close to the end of the race, kind of getting to the general election, I, I didn't like Biden, either. I didn't like Trump, I don't like Biden either. I think he's a better alternative, I will definitely say that. But when I just hear the phrase, like, settle for Biden, it just kind of makes me cringe a little bit. Because it's kind of sad, when you're talking about your country and your leadership, and you just hear settle for this guy. You don't like the other guy, just settle for him. And it's like, we shouldn't be talking about settling for someone. That's just when we're talking about a leader of a country. It's, it's sad to have to say that phrase and just be like, we got to settle for him, but it's at least better that he will be in office. But personally, I just don't like the two party political system. I wish that was just gone. And it was just candidates saying whatever their opinions are about the country and what they're gonna do. But that's just me.

BLV: Yeah, I, especially in the middle of the pandemic, where so many people have gotten sick or have died just to, you know, settle for it. It's frustrating. It's... yeah, I completely understand that. So I guess, what are some things that you think that you think need to change on a national or state or local level, just in the government regarding the pandemic?

BL: I would say, I think biggest thing is we need like legitimate medical experts helping with this, I know with a lot of the people who just believe COVID is a hoax or just don't believe it's that big of a threat, that kind of a thing. Just don't believe in like the CDC or don't believe what medical experts tell them. And it's like, these are medical experts, they went to school, they studied science, they studied medicine, and the human body. And they've done all these things. And the people who are complaining most of the time haven't. And I think people just needing to trust medical experts to do what they can even if they might make mistakes, like the CDC has made some mistakes. And like all humans, we all make mistakes. And yeah, the biggest thing just needs to be we need medical experts to make good rational decisions. And maybe we'll make mistakes along the way. But that's how humans are.

BLV: Leave the health decisions to the people that are qualified to make decisions on public health.

BL: Yeah, Exactly.

BLV: So going off that, what do you think that President Elect Biden needs to do when he takes office in January? He's kind of since, you know, seeing more results, he's talked about some of what he plans to do, but what do you think that needs to be done?

BL: I would think going back to my last answer, just getting some other medical experts to help with the like, I think they have a COVID Task Force now I believe. And so many people have been coming and going out of that task force that they need to get some good medical experts who are like eager to take the job and wanting to figure out what to get a vaccine figure out what's best for the American people, what's just going to be helpful for the country and itself. Other than that, I mean, maybe just talking with, you know, state governments and figuring out, you know, what are each of them doing in terms of ordinances? Figuring out, hey, what can they do better to help stop it and hopefully won't piss off too many people? Because people are going to be pissed off at anything, no matter what, because that's how humans are. But yeah, I would say those are my two biggest things, just talking with state governments and getting more medical experts.

BLV: Alright, so I guess with that, that kind of wraps up a lot of the questions I had, were there any closing statements that you wanted to make? Regarding anything we've talked about today? Um,

BL: I would just say, I would like people to take the virus more seriously, it's a serious thing. People can get hurt, they can have long lasting health problems because of it, they can die. I've never personally had it. But it's, it's still a virus. I mean, People you don't want to get a cold, you don't want to get the flu or anything. I mean, maybe those probably won't kill you, but they can still hurt you. And it's not fun to have them just take it seriously, so we can help stop this. The COVID- just stop this virus, because it's just getting out of hand at this point. And America as a country is just showing the people of America are showing its true colors of we are assholes and don't care about our own people. And that's a horrible country to live in when you think about that.

BLV: So it's, it's tough. Yeah. I can't really have that much to add on to that. So I guess thank you for having this interview with me today. If you have any questions, I'll be sure to stick around. So thank you.

BL: Thank you. Thank you very much.