

Interviewee: James Robert Macy

Interviewer: Jackson Igor Macy

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Abstract:

James Robert Macy was born and raised in Menomonee Falls Wisconsin and currently works at the VonBreisen Law firm as an employment lawyer. In this interview James not only talks about how Covid-19 has impacts him but his, family, friends, and the community as a whole both socially and economically. He shares what it was like dealing with helping small legislative governments come up with some laws that will both help current employees and employers of the state. James also shares his feelings towards what experiences he has felt and learned while being placed on mandatory lockdown.

JIM 0:03

All right, so can you hear me?

JRM 0:11

I can.

JIM 0:11

Alright. Good evening. My name is Jack Macy. The date is the 21st of Thursday or Wednesday. The time is 5:28pm. And would you like to introduce yourself?

JRM 0:29

Yeah, my name is Jim Macy.

JIM 0:33

So just to give you a little statistic on the USA total cases of COVID-19, today stands at 31,602,676. The total number of deaths is 565,613. For the USA, per stay capita, it's how many cases they have our 592,262. And the total number of deaths is 6721. In Wisconsin, the fully vaccinated percentage of people is 29.7%. And at least elite for at least one or more doses. It's at 42.8%. For the USA as a whole, the fully vaccinated percentage is 26% or roughly 86 point 3 million people. All start with, have you got vaccinated?

JRM 1:27

I have been vaccinated. I had the maternal shot, and I've had both shots.

JIM 1:34

Perfect. What are the primary things you do on a day-to-day basis?

JRM 1:41

I work full time. And so, I take care of things at home first before going to the office and then spend a full day plus in the office working with different people and helping different customers and clients.

JIM 1:58

Okay. What's your what's your job?

JRM 2:04

I'm an attorney and I represent companies and their employment matters.

JIM 2:10

Where do you live and what's it like to live there?

JRM 2:13

I live in Oshkosh, Wisconsin. I we have a residence on Lake Winnebago, which is the biggest inland lake in the state. And ash cash is community of a population of about 60 65,000 people. It's surrounded by other cities of similar size. So about four of them. So, it bumps up to close to a quarter-million within not too far of a distance. It recently was just ranked as one of the best place's small cities in the United States to live in. And also, as voted one of the best places to retire. And so, it's a really nice place to live.

JIM 3:02

You've been here your whole life.

JRM 3:04

No, I haven't been here my whole life. I came here in 1982.

JIM 3:11

All right. When you first learn about COVID, what are your thoughts about it?

JRM 3:19

Well, when I first heard about it, there was a lot of unknowns about it. There was a lot of fear amongst a lot of people about it, because we didn't know just how, how big an impact it would have on individuals compared to other things that we that I've seen in our in my lifetime, you know, we didn't know whether it was going to be something like the flu, which wasn't as significant. Or whether it would be something really devastating, like, oh, either, like aids when aids originally came out. And if somebody got it, they were presumed that they would die, or polio, which was physically debilitating to people. Um, so we just didn't know, we just knew it was a major, major thing. And there was a lot of unanswered questions.

JIM 4:15

Well, since you didn't know as much back then, and obviously you've gotten more information now from news media and just talking with people. What are your thoughts about it now?

JRM 4:25

Well, because I work with employment kind of stuff. I worked on COVID related issues every day, both with people wanting to stay home or people needing to come back to work or businesses trying to stay open or not stay open, or government requirements about staying open or not staying so I see it every day. And I've also seen it develop over time, you know, since the beginning since we've had this now for over a year. And my thoughts are to some degree quite a bit real leaved in a sense that while it is serious, it's not is is deadly is some of the is is some originally thought it might be, or as some past situations have been.

JIM 5:15

Yeah, you know, you mentioned polio is that we were referring to.

JRM 5:20

Yeah. And that's one of them that, and that was really young. But I had a brother that had polio. And I knew other people, you know, that got it. And then that was very physically debilitating, you know? So, yeah, that's one of them are referring to

JIM 5:38

Yes. Right. And I would assume that probably concerned you going up some cells in the family on, you know, what talking about concerns, what kind of concerns you have about COVID-19.

JRM 5:50

You know, to be honest, at this point, A year later, and with vaccines, I have significantly fewer concerns than I was originally concerned about, I think it's very manageable. I think people have come to deal with it. I think people are respectful. And trying to avoid problems with it. We know that it can be really, really serious for some segments of our population, but in other segments of our population, you know, the numbers are really good, that if people get it, it's not going to kill them. And it may not be so bad.

JIM 6:34

Yeah, I understand. And obviously, it's been a year later since COVID, is first officially hit, which is good to get some of that demographic and those numbers up now. And your thoughts as well, since we've been, you know, coping with it for a year. Now. different thoughts, obviously. With that being said, how has COVID-19 affected your job, you know, from start to finish, because obviously, as you mentioned, were further down a lie. I'm sure it's less restricting now.

JRM 7:05

Well, personally, my job hasn't changed much, because I still went into the office. I mean, we did all the safe practices and things like that. other colleagues came into the office. Fortunately, nobody gets sick amongst the group in the office. But again, people were careful. So personally, my physical ability to work and it didn't really change. The work type changed quite a bit, because there were lots of new laws, lots of new regulations for companies. So, I had to study and keep track of all that with all the changes and things that were occurring, educate clients, I did lots of training lots of programs, more than I probably ever have to update people about what the new laws would be in the different leaves that would be available. And then all the different kinds of cases that came up. So, from a workload standpoint, I've been lucky, I've always had a good practice, and I'm busy. But it's been an incredibly challenging year, because there's lots of new information, lots of changes, and helping companies through that. It's been really good, though. I've enjoyed the challenge, quite frankly.

JIM 8:16

Yeah, absolutely. And I think that type of employment you're in is perfect for my next question. In regard to, you know, you're dealing with people on a daily basis and helping them out with their employment. So, my question is, do you like, obviously, you know, people who are affected by COVID-19, and their employment? So how many? what people do you know, and how did it affect them?

JRM 8:41

Well, lots of people, I worked on a case today where somebody was driving a van, for example, was their job. And there, the place that they worked at was dealing with challenged individuals, handicapped individuals, like a sheltered workshop, and he took his mask off violated the safety rules, once he got in the van, and for about an hour, so we had to evaluate that, and he lost his job. And he also didn't get unemployment compensation, because that was a serious, serious health risk that really jeopardize the health of several of people in a really vulnerable population. And other words of those people get it, they have serious, serious chances of serious harm and possibly death. So, you know, that's just one example. That's just today. So, there are other cases of people that were very afraid to come back to work, but the companies really needed to then come back. One was an administrative assistant and a company, for example, who everybody kind of had to coordinate with and she was just scared. She just didn't want to come back to work. And I said, Well, we got to have Yeah. And then she eventually they consider that a resignation because she had to decide to do I want to just stay home They couldn't have her work at home or not. So, there are cases like that. And then there's lots of cases of people that really did lots of neat things, helping out other people. Either in the medical profession, the firefighters, the police officers, the teachers, and I get to work with all of those kinds of people and the great stories of the neat things that they did to help people and get through this, this scenario. So again, I there's a story every day, it's unbelievable. It's incredible.

JIM 10:37

Yeah, I bet you get to talk to a lot of different areas of fields of work. And it's interesting to get that perspective. You know, with that being said, obviously, your your work life and your family life and COVID clearly has impacted both, and I'm just wondering where you stand on how that's affected, or impacted your family life back home?

JRM 11:00

Well, you know, it hasn't impacted, you know, students tremendously where they lose out on the college experience, because it because the virtual learning and the other aspects of it, that that's been challenging for them, but at the same time, can be a positive challenge to recover from that or do better other family member decided to take time off from school because the virtual learning environment wasn't for them. But then they took another challenges and opportunities in the meantime. So they're taking some positive risks and jobs and business opportunities that, quite frankly, they probably he wouldn't have taken. But for COVID. So you

know, I want him we've been really fortunate if people did get sick in our family, we're not aware of anybody in our family that tested positive. First of all, there's some thinking that early on, a couple of family members may have had it. But symptoms were really small, minor. And in hindsight, knowing more of they might have had it, we weren't testing early, as you know, the tests weren't even available. That's how far we've come. So from a family standpoint, we've been really fortunate and not impacted that much, quite frankly, other than the things that I've talked about.

JIM 12:33

Yeah, absolutely. And, you know, in talking about family, you got to learn, you know, obviously, maybe the communication skills have changed. Definitely new lingo. As far as, during any pandemic, obviously, you can create new words and talk different. And obviously, COVID-19 was an isolation type of pandemic, do you think you've been socially changed? Or how is that affected you socially?

JRM 13:01

Well, again, it's interesting, even the company I work with is statewide now has offices in different parts of the state. And the way that it's worked has been different. It's been very different in the Milwaukee metro area with my colleagues, not as many of them go into the office, or Madison, when I went to do some work in the Madison office, I couldn't just go in the building, I had to check in out on the street at the door. And somebody had to come down to let me in, and all kinds of different protocols. In the Fox Valley where I work, it's safe, and people are respectful, but people are less concerned about getting back to the office and getting back to their routine. So, it is really very that way in terms of what I see or what we've experienced, has it changed life significantly for me now, not really, to be honest, because I went into the office early on, I was careful. If there's another if there's other interesting positives to it, things like, you know, we used to work through the winter, and I'd have a cold or two and people at the office would have the cold or cold or two or the flu. In looking at they were talking about the other day, there's practically been no calls, there's practically been no flu. And as people use all of the hygienic safety practices of washing their hands and social distancing and the wearing masks, there's been a lot of positive impacts on the other stuff that we just sort of rolled with and didn't think much about as murder winter in Wisconsin. It's been pretty nonexistent. So that's been can that's been a very strong positive. And the other aspect of that it's interesting, because we're teaching all of that term to kids in schools, they're learning better practices and hygiene and things like that, that'll carry on through their whole life. So, there's negatives, but there's incredible positives that I think that will carry through for many years.

JIM 15:01

And you mentioned you're talking about other people, which I'm going to switch over to my next question regarding the community have, have your neighborhood your neighborhood at

all, felt the impact? How are they adjusting to life? Do you? Do you see them last? Do you see them more? Or just how's your community at work? Is, is the work environment different? Do they treat you different?

JRM 15:28

Work Environment really isn't different. We had some people that prefer to work at home longer, and the firm has been really good at that if people could effectively do it and wanted to do it, they still continue to let them do it. And that's why I say like Milwaukee, Madison, a lot more still stay home or Green Bay, Fox Valley, Walker Shaw, you know, we have a lot of people that are in the office. So that hasn't impacted that much from a neighborhood standpoint. Again, it really varies. And where I go on the stage here in the Fox Valley, the stores are really busy, the restaurants are really busy. The hotels are pretty much back, had a someone staying at one of the local hotels who was a businessperson, and they said the hotel was full when we when we started this and again, because I work with hotels from a business standpoint, you know, they're down to 15 30% capacity at best was a good time period. So, a lot of ads back. And sign offs are much change there as we've sort of recovered.

JIM 16:34

Yeah, and that's good to get that to maintain that social health and in order and intact and preserve it honestly do a pandemic where were isolated from each other. Speaking a health Have you are you personally know anyone that has had COVID?

JRM 16:57

Oh, sure, I'm sure. But to be I don't know anybody who has got it to the extent that they were hospitalized or died. I don't know anybody in that category. I've heard of people who know people or relatives. I, again, people that have had it quarantined, and we're fine or a minor symptoms or things like that, fortunately. So I've known people that have had a lot worse flu and other things than what they experienced when they got COVID. And that's not to say COVID isn't serious or a big deal. It is it just impacts people so differently in different age groups. And depending on what their background or other health conditions are.

JIM 17:48

Yeah, I personally had on the same I have not seen anyone get critically ill with it to the point where they have either passed away or gone to the hospital and not combat. You mentioned that you work for the IRS, you're a lawyer, a public lawyer, and you clearly have ties, or have worked with the government officials before or know something about it. So do you think any Do you have any thoughts on how local state or federal leaders are responding to the crisis differently?

JRM 18:24

Yeah, and actually, I am in a unique position about that, because I represent when I say companies, both private sector companies like manufacturers or hotels or restaurants, but I also represent a lot of governmental businesses, like counties, cities, school districts. So, I've been involved in their decisions to pass different safety regulations. We were involved in some of the early litigation over whether or not a governmental unit would have authority to stop business. I've certainly written articles on the Wisconsin Supreme Court cases regarding the differences of the governor's authority to pass certain restrictive things, in fact, overturned three times now with this Supreme Court. And also, from the business side to say, you know, we'll take on our own liability and our own risks, let us stay open, don't shut us down. So I've kind of been in the middle of all of those debates, as we've worked through this, and if I had an opinion on it, I understand government's concern and the need to help in a health crisis, but I think they overshot this one and I think history in hindsight is going to say that they kind of overreacted early. That caused a lot more damage than had to have been done. But hindsight, it's great. You know, hindsight, it's easy to say that a year later versus what we knew them

JIM 20:00

Yeah, that's a very interesting viewpoint. You know, with regards to getting news about COVID, and, you know, cycling the information that you get through different sources of media. What would you say your biggest reference point was when it came to receiving news and getting updates as far as either vaccines or total con such as any news?

JRM 20:31

Well, I think I kind of tuned out the, the, what's referred to as the mainstream media. Because I didn't find it to be as helpful or as accurate. What I found to be more helpful was things like the CDC and the guidance that was put out by the different agencies. And again, I recognize they had a tough thing to do, because nobody knew what we were dealing with. But at least I may put out guidance, they didn't put out dictating what everything should be, but they put out good solid guidance that changed. As we learned more, and I thought they did a good job. And I thought that was really helpful. One of the more difficult things to really sort through was what people would refer to as follow the science. Well, the science wasn't black and white, never has been, certainly wasn't through this scenario. And through one of our senators, offices here in Wisconsin, they put together some really good medical information from a variety of medical providers, doctors, nationally known, renowned doctors. And so I listened to a lot of that and followed a lot of that to say, what are the pros in the business saying that had a different point of view and was able to sort through some of that, so coupled with the guidance from the health professionals, plus studying and listening to lots lots and lots of videos, from the doctors, as this developed was most helpful for me, and far better than just statistics or other things, you had started this interview with the statistics, I don't doubt any of the numbers that you're

talking about. But the problem with statistics is you always got to know what's the background of the statistics. So, when we say x people died of COVID, did they die just have COVID? Or did they have stage, you know, late-stage cancer, and then they happen to get COVID and then died of that. Now, I'm not saying that's not serious. I'm not saying that's not a COVID issue. All I'm saying is, you always got to look behind the numbers to see what it's telling me. I'll give you another example. It didn't tell me much to say x tested positive for COVID. One, we weren't testing early, we couldn't even we didn't even know how to test, we didn't have the test. Then there were multiple tests that took a little while, and there were false positives and other aspects were there. And then we were pretty much just testing people when they thought they were sick. So, of course, you're going to get a higher percentage than that would say that. So, it's what's behind the numbers on that. The other thing it didn't tell me is just because somebody had COVID. How serious was that? You know, is it less than having a cold? Then really, is that really a good helpful statistic? What I found the most helpful and where I'm going with this is what were the hospital numbers? What were the acute unit numbers, that's the serious stuff? And that I watched pretty closely, and we did three different parts of the state that different health agencies did, because that's where we knew that something would be more serious and have a bigger impact on everybody. If our hospitals got overrun. And that was a fear in the beginning, we were in big trouble. And fortunately, our country, our health professionals, or governmental officials, made some pretty quick good decisions that don't get much credit now but to avoid lots of big issues about that, that's what I watched if that's helpful.

JIM 24:20

Yeah, absolutely. That's helpful. You've mentioned before that you have personally not had COVID Is that correct?

JRM 24:33

Not that I know of and I really didn't have you know, I've had a runny nose or some of that kind of stuff. I've tested three different times. One I tested because I was going in for a minor medical procedure, just routine. And they test you before you can have anything done and I was negative for that. I went in another time because I wasn't feeling good about a month ago and I was concerned about it. So I did one on the drive thru clinic tests and was negative. And then more recently, I had another medical situation. And they tested me again. And it's always been negative.

JIM 25:11

Right? So, where I was going with this was if had you have said that you had COVID my next question was, did you at any point thought either your life was in danger, or you thought that there was no help, and you felt helpless at any point in time?

JRM 25:29

I never did. And while I took it seriously, and well, I took precautions, and I followed the guidance. I was not afraid of it. And I certainly didn't stay home. I did grocery shopping. But I did it smartly. I followed the guidance; I follow the other things we're supposed to do. I did do social activities to the degree that that was smart and safe. I went to work regularly. And I never ever felt, gee, if I get COVID, I'm going to die. Um, I just, I didn't want that to run my life, quite frankly. But that's not to say it wasn't it isn't serious. And that's not to say that we didn't make smart decisions along the way to do that. Okay, so it wasn't that I don't believe it. It wasn't that I was totally ignorant about it. Just it wasn't going to roll my life either.

JIM 26:29

Right. And just to go off that. What do you what do you think the biggest takeaway you've learned? And I'm just moving for your thoughts on this whole COVID experience? And I understand it's still happening. But what do you think you've learned the most from this experience?

JRM 26:52

Well, I think, let me take it on a bigger scale. First more global scale is I think, as a country, we've learned that we can't wait for this stuff to happen, and that we collectively, regardless of politics, or any other business, I think we can do better preparing for this stuff. And you can ever be fully prepared. But I think we were unprepared. And our initial response was almost like a 1700s response because we didn't really know what else to do about that. But with a little bit more preparation, I think we learned that our medical people could adapt pretty quick. I think we learn that our pharmaceutical companies are unbelievable in this country. Some stuff we take for granted, but I'll fast. They turned around testing, first of all, and then turn around vaccines is unbelievable. It's unprecedented. So, learn a lot of things to feel really good about can we prep better? Sure, do. We have a lot in ventilators. You know, early on, there were discussions about let's turn around industry to make sure in case we have hospital overruns with ventilators, we're ready to go, you know, we're ready to go. You don't even hear that word anymore. It was it just it just happened. Um, and while we argue and while we fight, and while we talk about this country, once in a while in a negative fashion, we step back, and we look at this point history. We look at whatever all that happened on all levels. It's incredible, that the impact wasn't significantly greater and how much how much we can do when we have to do? I'm really encouraged by that.

JIM 28:48

do you think that the COVID-19 experience is still going to be affected? And a year?

JRM 29:00

Um, that's a good question. I don't know. I mean, there's so much we keep learning. I'm really optimistic about the vaccines. I'm really, and we're not standing still either. I mean, there's developments and things being worked on all the time, beyond the vaccines about this. And again, we don't get a lot of news on that. But there's certainly other there's news about those kinds of things going on, whether it's stem cell work and other things that are there helping with this and the mutations of it. I'm encouraged by all of that, well, we still won't be living with it to some degree, but I think I think things Oh, you know, after 911, the world changed and flying on an airplane was never quite the same. And it's kind of like what we'll go through here to some degree. It'll never quite be the same, but we'll get back to a sense of normalcy, and it'll just be a little bit different as to what's in Well, I think we'll be fine. And I don't think it'll be much of an impact than a year. That's my hope and goal and prayer.

JIM 30:10

Yeah, absolutely. Obviously, we've been doing it for a year. You know, you know, you hear about stories about people, either losing tremendous, tremendous amount of weight, learning a new subject, learning something new teaching something new. What do you do you think you've had any success stories or anything you learn anything new during this lockdown?

JRM 30:33

Well, I learned a lot of new employment law. But other than that, you know, I learned to have a lot of faith and hope and lots of people and learn to have lots of faith and hope and local governments that made some mistakes but made a lot of good decisions to work in through this kind of stuff. I learned a lot watching the schools learn how to adapt to some of this. And quite frankly, we had a lot of work to do thereof all the industries that I was like, as a worker, lots of them. I think the schools, both from a college standpoint, in a secondary school standpoint, had the toughest transitional periods during the last year. And I think they have a lot to learn. I don't think they did. Well, this is just my opinion. But I think of all the industries they came in last, versus all the other industries that had the same kind of challenges and same kind of struggles in some form or another. But again, that's just my opinion. I think schools will do better down the road once they think this through. That's not all schools, a lot of schools did incredible. A lot of schools are still failing.

JIM 31:49

Yeah, absolutely. I'm going to wrap it up here, Jim. So thank you very much for your time, and just want to make sure and double tap on your okay. And you agree to the consent of filming this and posting this to the archive.

JRM 32:07

Absolutely consent. No problem at all. And good questions. good discussion and thank you for the opportunity. Of course, Jim,

JIM 32:15

it's great to have you. You have a great rest of your day. You are too. Thank