



State of New Mexico

Michelle Lujan Grisham
Governor

May 19, 2020

Dear New Mexico Senate Republicans,

I am in receipt of your letter dated May 18 in which you without evidence claim that the “effects” of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has killed thousands more Americans than the Iraq War and the War in Afghanistan combined, “have not risen to the levels initially thought” by “many experts and leaders.” I am unaware of any public health experts who view 90,000 deaths -- and rising every day -- as a mild or moderate outcome. I am unaware of any of the hundreds of heartbroken, grieving families in New Mexico who have lost a loved one -- a father, a mother, a grandfather or grandmother, indeed even men and women, our neighbors, who were only in their 30s, 40s and 50s -- who would consider the outcome of this heinous virus to be primarily a tragedy of “economic shortfall,” as you put it. These are your constituents as well as mine. Any framework for moving forward amid this pandemic that suggests hundreds -- and even potentially thousands -- of deaths is of relatively little consequence and may be or indeed must be swept aside in favor of heedless talking points prioritizing economic stagnation over preventable death on a mass scale is a false choice and is unacceptable. For what it’s worth, the supposedly mild “effects” you describe of this pandemic at this stage are attributable to the decisive and early actions I took to protect New Mexicans and thus alter the initial trajectory of the virus -- and thus put us in a position to disseminate safety guidelines for reopening businesses, as we have done, as you fully know.

I notice your letter does not cite the reporting or study of any public health experts or any scientific or epidemiological leaders. That is because no public health expert or epidemiologist could or would or does support what you describe as a simple “common sense” approach to this unprecedented public health crisis -- an approach that would be better described as utter failure and unflinching surrender to the virus ravaging our communities, your communities, those you represent, whether you believe in the danger of this disease or not.

I further notice your letter elides the glaring fact that New Mexico’s relative success in combating this virus is due to the fact my administration has taken strong steps to protect New Mexicans from precisely the kind of proudly anti-scientific bluster and misjudgment encapsulated in your letter. I notice your letter does not acknowledge the clear and data-driven steps my administration has taken to keep New Mexicans -- your constituents -- safe and healthy as we work every single day to move forward in balancing our recovery from the devastating economic effects of this pandemic with the mandate to prevent illness and save lives. As you fully know New Mexico is largely “re-open,” with all retail businesses able to operate and only a few exemptions because of the high-

risk nature of the services at those establishments. As you fully know I have outlined a plan to move even those services back into operation in the very near future -- consistent with the transmission data of this virus demonstrating continued progress -- and, again, as you fully know, our ability to move forward safely under those guidelines in a COVID-positive world, one in which your lives and the lives of your families and your constituents are protected from this heinous disease, depends upon your support for physical distancing measures. I notice you did not and have not publicly supported any of the public health measures and guidelines my administration has taken that have in the same breath saved lives and now allow New Mexico businesses to move forward safely and with less risk of disease transmission and death, not in this letter nor anywhere else. I notice you have not at any stage advocated for small business support at the federal level or in any fashion used your platform to support the federal disbursement of relief funds the state has secured for New Mexico business-owners and entrepreneurs; nor have you used your platforms or offices to advocate the federal government or White House for restoring state budgets and funds, which will be essential as we move forward economically. You are fully aware of my administration's unequivocal commitment to a thriving and well-rounded economy -- as evidenced by the remarkable job-creation and diversification success we saw in 2019 -- and I will assume your stated concern for the state's economy in this letter signals your aggressive support for my administration's continued work on that front moving forward.

We do not yet fully understand this disease. We do not yet understand why men and women as young as their 30s are dying of sudden strokes. We do not yet understand why children in other parts of the country and across the world are suddenly becoming sickened, and some losing their precious young lives, by a rare syndrome working in concert with the coronavirus. Indeed, in New Mexico, our rate of children and teenagers who have contracted COVID-19 is frighteningly high in comparison with other states.

What we do understand is that when individuals are sickened with this virus, they die alone. Mothers and fathers leave for the hospital short of breath -- and never return. Grandmothers and grandfathers, our tribal brothers and sisters, our neighbors all across this state are grappling with the awful trauma of losing loved ones without getting to say goodbye. Your reckless demand for a full-scale "re-opening" -- which, again, ignores the plain facts of the crisis and the actions my administration has taken to effectively countenance them -- serves only to inflame misinformed public opinion, which is to risk further illness and likely death, death that will be lonely and all the more tragic because it was and is within our power to prevent.

Thank you for your correspondence, and I greatly look forward to your support for and leadership on initiatives that will provide meaningful relief for New Mexico businesses and industries affected by this awful pandemic during the forthcoming special session.

Kindly,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michelle Lujan Grisham". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Michelle" being the most prominent.

Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham