

individual Americans are smart enough to make their own decisions. The Democrats don't think that these kids and their parents and their doctors can make their decision. They don't believe in choice when it comes to medical decision making. They believe that they know better.

But in this case, it isn't just a matter of taking something that is ineffective; it is mandating a vaccine that threatens the health and well-being of these kids—not just a vaccine, mandating three vaccines with no mention of even whether the kids have already had COVID, which is essentially another inoculation.

So this is a disappointing day, but this is consistent with what we have seen time and again, whether it is having a nationwide emergency mandating that you wear masks in school, masks on planes, vaccines here, vaccines there. This is a desire by the majority party to control your life, to control your medical decision making because they know better.

They want to beg off and say this is about the science. I recited 15 different studies for them. They didn't recite one study because no study exists saying that three vaccines for kids reduces hospitalization, transmission, or death. There is no science. Large, nationwide studies of this problem have gotten a dozen countries to say we shouldn't be giving three vaccines to kids. Half of Europe won't allow you to do it. They won't allow the mandates.

The argument is made, oh, well, we have to do what everybody is doing in schools. Even the colleges—90 percent of the colleges aren't requiring this. This was a bad mandate from the beginning. Most of the colleges have woken up and understand now, one, that this is America and you ought to be able to make your own medical decisions, but, two, that the science points towards booster vaccine mandates actually being a threat to the health and well-being of adolescents.

I am very disappointed, but I think this illustrates where we are in America, where one party thinks they are smarter than every American, smarter than every individual, and they will make your medical decisions for you.

I rest my case.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Hawaii.

MAUI WILDFIRES

Ms. HIRONO. Mr. President, tomorrow marks 1 month since the devastating fires that destroyed the historic town of Lahaina on Maui and damaged several of Maui's upcountry communities.

These devastating fires and the events that followed have been harrowing for all those who call Maui home and the many more who have visited these communities over the years. Initial estimates suggest the fires destroyed nearly 3,000 structures in Lahaina, almost 90 percent of which were residential. It also leveled roughly 700 businesses in and around

Lahaina's historic Front Street. Tragically, the fires have claimed 115 lives to date, with some 385 people still unaccounted for.

These numbers are devastating and reflect the pain and anguish Hawaii is feeling. But this disaster did not simply impact a collection of numbers or statistics; it impacted a community of people, tight-knit and proud—business owners who served as stewards of family-owned shops and restaurants passed down through generations; immigrants who came to Maui in search of a better life for themselves and their families; firefighters who raced into horrific, toxic conditions to try to save a town they loved even as many of their own homes burned to the ground mere miles away; and so many more who called Lahaina home.

As the onetime capital of the Kingdom of Hawaii, Lahaina holds great agriculture and historic significance for the Native Hawaiian community. For some families, their roots in Lahaina date back more than a century, with homes passed down from generation to generation. Others came from elsewhere, captivated by Lahaina's beauty and charm. And before the fires, Lahaina was a bustling seaside town that welcomed thousands of visitors every month. But in mere moments, all of that was destroyed as 80-mile-per-hour winds, fueled by a hurricane 500 miles away, propelled the fire through the town with unimaginable speed and fury.

The devastation is difficult to put into words, as is the trauma this community is experiencing. Front Street, once vibrant with the sounds of music and revelers in the air, is now eerily quiet. The only sound to be heard is often the clanging of twisted metal in the wind. At the hotels where survivors are staying, parents are afraid to send their children to school, not wanting them out of their sight.

I met a woman who escaped the fire with just a backpack of belongings—a backpack she now takes everywhere with her, refusing to take it off her back. I met hotel workers and others, especially a mental health worker who said that weeks after the fires, some residents and workers were so traumatized, they didn't even want to come out of their rooms.

At the same time, at a time of grief and loss, residents have been subjected to disinformation on social media, likely coordinated by foreign government entities, to discourage residents from reaching out to FEMA for disaster assistance and disinformation that sows distrust in the Federal Government. It is an all-hands-on-deck effort to combat this kind of disinformation and make sure survivors can access Federal support.

As we work to ensure the survivors of this disaster have the support they need, we are also working to understand the full cost of the devastation. According to initial estimates, the damage to property alone from these

fires is upwards of \$5 billion. Estimates for rebuilding Lahaina are more than double that.

Rebuilding will take time, resources, and a continuity of effort. That is why I am so grateful for the strong response of the full family of Federal Agencies, more than 25 of which are on the ground in Maui with over 1,000 personnel. From FEMA and SBA to HHS, HUD, DOD, and so many others, the Federal family responded with speed to meet the immediate needs of those impacted.

Within days of the fires starting, FEMA, working with the Governor, mayor, and local entities, was able to get thousands of survivors into hotel rooms, Airbnbs, and other short-term shelters. To date, more than \$50 million in Federal assistance to individuals has already been approved. But we know this is just the beginning. Federal personnel have also been critical to the search and rescue efforts, coming from around the country to help search through the rubble and identify the remains of those lost.

When President Biden visited last month, he made a commitment that the Federal Government will be there for as long as it takes to help Lahaina recover and rebuild as the community—as the community—envisions. The \$4 billion in additional FEMA funding the President requested late last week is an important downpayment on that promise.

This funding will help ensure FEMA has the resources it needs to continue its critical disaster relief work not just on Maui but in other communities impacted by disasters all across our country. I hope it will pass with strong bipartisan support, as has long been the case for disaster relief funding.

But we know, as I said before, this is just the beginning. In the decade since Hurricane Sandy wreaked havoc on New York and New Jersey, FEMA has spent more than \$18 billion assisting impacted communities. FEMA's long-term cost for its response to Hurricane Katrina in 2005 exceeded \$60 billion. Like those communities, Lahaina's rebuilding will take time and, as I said before, a continuity of effort.

These fires took so much from so many, but the spirit of aloha—of love, kindness, and care for one another—continues. It is that aloha that brought our community together after this crisis, and I have faith that it will continue to see us through.

I will be here, along with my colleagues from Hawaii—my other Senator, BRIAN SCHATZ, is here as part of our delegation—to fight for everything Hawaii and Maui needs to recover and rebuild, guided by the voices and values of those who call Lahaina home.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. CANTWELL). The Senator from New Jersey.

Mr. MENENDEZ. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that prior to the scheduled votes, I be permitted to

speak for 6 minutes, Senator LUJÁN for 5 minutes, and Senator CANTWELL for 5 minutes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

NOMINATION OF ADRIANA DEBORA KUGLER

Mr. MENENDEZ. Madam President, every so often, this Chamber is granted an opportunity to alter the course of American history. These rare opportunities allow us to pick up the torch, hoist it high like those who came before, and carry it forward as we strive to create a more perfect Union.

Today, we have such an opportunity. In a few minutes, this body will consider the nomination of a preeminent economist, Dr. Adriana Kugler, to serve on the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve. Already, she has broken barriers and blazed new trails—the first Hispanic American ever nominated to serve in that critical role.

But for my colleagues who will soon cast their votes on her nomination, I would just like to highlight what this means for the 62 million Latinos who call America home. Simply put, we see ourselves reflected in her story and her nomination.

Dr. Kugler is a first-generation American, the daughter of immigrants from Colombia. To hear her tell her story is to listen to the American dream come to life, from her grandparents who overcame tremendous obstacles—whether it was fleeing religious persecution, being orphaned at the age of 3, or dropping out of high school to help a widowed mother raise five siblings. Dr. Kugler's family instilled in her the importance of grit and resilience alongside an unwavering work ethic. As a result, her life's work has been to help others similarly rise above their station.

For more than 25 years as an economist, she has conducted essential research on labor markets, worker mobility, and firm productivity—three areas that are essential to the Federal Reserve's mandate.

She currently serves as U.S. Executive Director at the World Bank after previously serving as Chief Economist at the Department of Labor, bringing a domestic and international perspective at a time when global economies have never been more connected. Because of this work, because of her sterling credentials and outstanding reputation, Dr. Kugler's nomination has earned the endorsement of 33 peer economists from across the political spectrum. In a joint letter, they called her “a brilliant, objective economist who takes an evidence-based approach to decision-making and is an expert in policy evaluation.”

Make no mistake, Dr. Kugler is eminently qualified for the role she has been nominated for. At her confirmation hearing, she reaffirmed a fundamental commitment to the Federal Reserve dual mandate, pledging to continue its efforts to bring down high inflation that is hurting workers and businesses alike.

In addition to her qualifications and balanced approach to decision making, Dr. Kugler has demonstrated time and time again that she will uphold the Federal Reserve's long legacy of independent decision making. It is precisely because those decisions affect every community in our country that I am especially proud that Dr. Kugler will finally bring lived experience of being Latino in the United States to the Federal Reserve leadership.

That is right. In the nearly 110-year history of the Federal Reserve, there has never, ever been a Latino serving on this Board of Governors. Not once. Simply put, it is an affront to the 62 million Hispanic Americans who meaningfully contribute to our economy. It is out of step with the fact that our economic input as a community is nearly \$3 trillion. And it violates the idea that the hopes and dreams of Latinos are essential to the promise of America.

So it is time for Latinos to serve the highest levels of the Federal Reserve. It is time for Latinos to be taken seriously as an essential part of our American family and economy. And it is time for us to confirm Dr. Adriana Kugler as a meaningful step towards that goal. Never again should a Latino or Latina have to wonder if they can rise from humble beginnings to occupy seats of power. Today's vote helps us do just that.

At its core, it is about changing the face of leadership so that our institutions, these bodies that we entrust with the future wealth and prosperity of our country, can fully reflect the Nation that they serve. In no uncertain terms, Dr. Kugler is a remarkable economist and a fantastic nominee to serve as the first Latina on the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve. I am proud to have championed her historic nomination, and now it is time that we turn it into a historic confirmation.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Mexico.

NOMINATION OF ANNA M. GOMEZ

Mr. LUJÁN. Madam President, communications and technology are at the forefront of policy today. From protecting consumers to establishing competitive and open markets to using spectrum and fiber to close the digital divide, the Federal Communications Commission is the expert Agency to establish regulations, policy, and recommendations to Congress.

Before us today is a genuine and passionate public servant. Anna Gomez has proven herself to be a prominent leader in technology and telecommunications, and I urge my colleagues to support her confirmation.

Ms. Gomez is more than ready to assume her next role in public service as our fifth and final FCC Commissioner. As I often say, folks know the difference between fast internet, slow internet, and no internet. I rise today before my colleagues to voice my sup-

port for a deeply qualified person who knows the difference between fast internet, slow internet, and no internet. She has the experience to bridge those divides.

Today, one in five families in New Mexico are living without a reliable connection to the internet. Ms. Gomez has worked on bringing more reliable and affordable ways to connect Americans to the internet almost as long as the term “digital divide” has been around. I was a strong advocate for the President to nominate Anna, and her reception here in the Senate is proof that she is the right choice. Anna's professional record is impeccable, and her path is an inspiration.

During her confirmation hearing, Ms. Gomez shared her story of scraping, borrowing, and working her way through college and through law school. Beyond law school, Ms. Gomez's experience in the White House, the State Department, the U.S. Senate, the National Telecommunications and Information Administration, and the FCC shows us all that she is not afraid to roll up her sleeves and get to work.

I am confident that with her issue-oriented experience at every level of the congressionally mandated responsibilities of the FCC, she will be ready on day one. Protecting the public interest and advancing universal service for broadband and broadcast services is a passion for Ms. Gomez.

Anna's voice as the first Latina to serve on the Commission since my fellow New Mexican, Gloria Tristani, is very welcomed. I know that many of my colleagues here know that numbing sense of fear one can have when your constituents are in the midst of danger from a wildfire or a hurricane or a flood, with no way to reach them. Having reliable access to broadband connectivity during an emergency can mean the difference between someone coming home or not.

Anna Gomez has worked on securing reliable communication access for our first responders all across the country. As we continue to encounter more and more climate disasters, these efforts made by Ms. Gomez will continue to play a critical role.

Moreover, the Federal Communications Commission has never been more important in our Nation's history. These technologies have proven their value and demonstrated huge potential. However, the complexities of these ever-evolving technological wonders are multifaceted, intersectional, and complex.

Americans need the force of a fully appointed Federal Communications Commission to protect consumers, to guarantee competition, and foster innovation. The mission and work of the FCC has never been more important to the future of our Nation.

Anna Gomez will play a pivotal role in setting the course for our country into the next digital generation. I urge my colleagues to work together to bridge these digital divides; and today,