



PROCEEDINGS OF THE GIBRALTAR PARLIAMENT

AFTERNOON SESSION: 3.38 p.m. – 3.52 p.m.

Gibraltar, Friday, 18th December 2020

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The Gibraltar Parliament

The Parliament met at 3.38 p.m.

[MR SPEAKER: Hon. M L Farrell BEM GMD RD JP *in the Chair*]

[CLERK TO THE PARLIAMENT: P E Martinez Esq *in attendance*]

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS

Standing Order 7(1) suspended to proceed with Government Statement

Clerk: Meeting of Parliament, Friday, 18th December 2020.

Suspension of Standing Orders – the Hon. the Minister for the Health Authority, Justice, Multiculturalism, Equality and Community Affairs.

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Minister for the Health Authority, Justice, Multiculturalism, Equality and Community Affairs (Hon. Miss S J Sacramento): Mr Speaker, I beg to move, under Standing Order 7(3), to suspend Standing Order 7(1) in order to proceed with a Government Statement.

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Mr Speaker: Those in favour? (**Members:** Aye.) Those against? Carried.

Spike in COVID-19 cases – Statement by the Minister for the Health Authority, Justice, Multiculturalism, Equality and Community Affairs

Minister for the Health Authority, Justice, Multiculturalism, Equality and Community Affairs (Hon. Miss S J Sacramento): Mr Speaker, it is with a heavy heart that Her Majesty's Government of Gibraltar has found it necessary to react to the current spike in COVID-19 cases that Gibraltar is experiencing. Mr Speaker will, no doubt, have noted that in the last five days the number of active cases in Gibraltar has risen from 42 on 14th December, this past Monday, to 120 today. This is an increase of 78 active cases. The total number of new cases in that five-day period is 102.

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In order to flatten the curve, Her Majesty's Government of Gibraltar – following a meeting of the Civil Contingencies Committee, which I have chaired this morning and which was also attended by Minister Cortes and by the Director of Public Health and all the other Committee members – recommended a number of immediate measures to come into force to attempt to flatten the curve during this festive season. These measures have immediate effect.

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One of the motivating factors is not just to stop numbers rising, but we must also remember that the virus has an incubation period of 10 days. This brings us to Christmas Day, when many of us will be planning to visit our families and loved ones. We are putting them at greater risk if we do not curb the spike immediately.

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First of all, restaurants, bars, cafes and all other establishments operating under a permit relating to the serving of food and/or alcohol on the premises will now need to close their doors at 7 p.m. each evening with regard to consumption on the premises. They will continue to be able to serve food for takeaways, as they currently can, and hotel guests will continue to be able to be

30 served in hotel restaurants. Secondly, the consumption of alcohol in public places, other than
licensed premises, between the hours of 7 p.m. and 8 a.m. will be an offence. Additionally, on
24th December, Christmas Eve, no alcohol consumption will be permitted in public places, other
than licensed premises, as from 4 p.m.

35 It is hoped that these measures will bring about a reduction in active cases so as to ensure that
our most vulnerable persons are kept safe and our Health Services are able to cope without a
lockdown being necessary. However, it is also likely that there may be further restrictions next
week, if we are so advised.

Mr Speaker, changes in legislation and in rules can only take us so far when dealing with
COVID-19. We all need to ensure that we continue to take heed of the importance of social
40 distancing, and in particular when out and about during this time. Likewise, we should all follow
Public Health guidance regarding handwashing and mask wearing, as far as possible.

Mr Speaker, it is extremely difficult for us to have to announce these measures today,
particularly as we enter the final week leading up to the Christmas holidays, and we realise that
they will come as a great disappointment to many, but having discussed the matter today with
45 the Chief Minister and also with the Leader of the Opposition, who has also agreed to these
measures, we all feel that, at this juncture, given the prevalence of the virus, it is the right thing
to do for the safety of us all. The numbers are clear and cannot be ignored. We must do everything
we can to protect others, and in particular the vulnerable and the elderly, especially those who
are over 70. It is vital we do all we can to be responsible and flatten the curve and thereby save
50 lives and bring us as safely as possible to the New Year.

Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: The Hon. Elliott Phillips.

55 **Hon. E J Phillips:** Mr Speaker, I thank the Hon. the Minister for the Statement, and we
empathise with the nature of the Statement being brought to this House. It must have been an
extremely difficult decision for the Government to present that Statement. We are grateful to her
and the rest of the Government for reaching out to the Leader of the Opposition to explain the
rationale for the decision. The direction of travel unfortunately remains clear in respect of COVID-
60 19 and therefore the Opposition is supportive and understanding of the restrictions that the
Government has imposed today.

Mr Speaker, this is a very sensitive time for our community. Traditionally, members of our
community, old and young, celebrate Christmas very well up and down Main Street, in the bars
and restaurants of our community, and this will indeed come as a great shock and disappointment
65 to many members of our community, particularly the younger generation, many of whom are back
from college, back from university or indeed out celebrating. As we speak in this House today,
people are celebrating the end of a week close to Christmas, and this will be a disappointing
Statement to be received by members of the public.

I hope that members of the public hear the Minister's words: it is a decision of the Government
70 which is supported by the Opposition. But we are likely to have a certain amount of chaotic scenes,
given that we are three and a half hours away from 7 p.m., when restaurants will indeed have to
close. Those restaurants have been provided with very little notice. They have, of course, procured
fresh produce, they have taken deposits for Christmas parties this afternoon from businesses, and
one of the things that I would ask the Government to do is look at ways in which we can
75 compensate those restaurants up and down town and in every part of Gibraltar, which will, with
three and a half hours, suffer fairly significant losses over the next couple of days. I am sure they
will understand the Minister's Statement, which is supported by Members opposite in this House,
but it does bring into sharp focus the level of support that may well be required – and targeted
support for parts of our business community that will suffer considerable losses over the festive
80 season. But health must, of course, come first, and we must pull together as a community to
ensure that that spike is driven in a downward direction.

I am grateful for the Hon. Minister's Statement. It is supported on this side of the House. And to all those young people who are out, as we speak, it is a big disappointment to them, and we understand that – we have all been young – but it is something that we need to do as a community: pull together and drive the spike in a downward direction.

With a heavy heart, we support the decision of the Government moving forward and it is hoped that they can look to businesses now and reassure them that the Government supports them in the next few days when there will be, clearly, financial loss to those businesses.

Mr Speaker, I am grateful.

Mr Speaker: The Hon. Minister.

Hon. Miss S J Sacramento: Mr Speaker, we are, of course, mindful of the impact that this decision will have in relation to people who have made arrangements and the impact that this will have on businesses, and the things that we will need to consider in the way that we have been very mindful of the impact that our decisions in relation to prioritising public safety have taken so far.

This is not a decision that we have taken lightly. This is something that we monitor on a daily basis. It is something that the Government would have very much liked to avoid. We would have most certainly wanted to avoid having to make this announcement at all, let alone having to make this announcement at this time with immediate effect, but on the basis of the figures, on the basis of advice and on the basis of the trends that are being predicted, we feel that it is not only the right thing to do but the only thing that we can do at this juncture.

Thank you.

Mr Speaker: Does any other hon. Member wish to speak?

Standing Order 7(1) suspended to proceed with Government Bills

Clerk: Suspension of Standing Orders – the Hon. the Minister for the Health Authority, Justice, Multiculturalism, Equality and Community Affairs.

Minister for the Health Authority, Justice, Multiculturalism, Equality and Community Affairs (Hon. Miss S J Sacramento): Mr Speaker, I beg to move, under Standing Order 7(3), to suspend Standing Order 7(1) in order to proceed with Government Bills.

Mr Speaker: Those in favour? (**Members:** Aye.) Those against? Carried.

ADJOURNMENT

Clerk: Adjournment – the Hon. the Minister for the Environment, Sustainability, Climate Change and Education.

Minister for the Environment, Sustainability, Climate Change and Education (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes): Mr Speaker, I am not a purveyor of any better news than we have just heard, except for those who would rather not listen to the proceedings of this House.

As we all know – and this is known to the hon. Members opposite – the Brexit negotiations continue as time moves ahead, and therefore, as on several previous occasions recently, the Chief Minister and the Deputy Chief Minister are taken up with those critical negotiations and

125 discussions. Therefore, I have the honour to move that the House do now adjourn to Monday, 21st December at 3 p.m. That is this coming Monday at 3 p.m.

Mr Speaker: I now propose the question, which is that this House do now adjourn to Monday, 21st December at 3 p.m.

130 I now put the question, which is that this House do now adjourn to Monday, 21st December at 3 p.m. Those in favour? (**Members:** Aye.) Those against? Passed.

This House will now adjourn to Monday, 21st December at 3 p.m.

The House adjourned at 3.52 p.m.