



PROCEEDINGS OF THE GIBRALTAR PARLIAMENT

MORNING SESSION: 11.10 a.m. – 1.40 p.m.

Gibraltar, Thursday, 28th May 2020

Contents

| | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| Prayer | 2 |
| Confirmation of Minutes | 2 |
| Announcements | 2 |
| Welcome back to Members following COVID lockdown – Statement by the Chief Minister .. | 2 |
| Procedural – Order of business | 27 |
| COVID-19 emergency – Statement by Mr Speaker | 27 |
| <i>The House adjourned at 1.40 p.m.</i> | 28 |

The Gibraltar Parliament

The Parliament met at 11.10 a.m.

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

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

PRAYER

Mr Speaker

CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

Clerk: Thursday, 28th May 2020, Meeting of Parliament.

Order of Proceedings: (i) Oath of Allegiance; (ii) Confirmation of Minutes – the Minutes of the last meeting of Parliament, which was held on 20th March 2020.

5

Mr Speaker: May I sign the Minutes as correct? (**Members:** Aye.)

Mr Speaker signed the Minutes.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Welcome back to Members following COVID lockdown – Statement by the Chief Minister

Clerk: (iii) Communications from the Chair; (iv) Petitions; (v) Announcements – the Hon. the Chief Minister.

10 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Mr Speaker, it is my pleasure to welcome all Members back to Parliament for this May session.

The Parliament, since we have been elected, apart from the period of Brexit, has met on a monthly basis other than in April, and despite the convoluted times in which we live, this year to date, starting this session now in May, we will have met every month except April.

15 I want to, in particular, welcome you back to Parliament, Mr Speaker. Last time we met we had to make do with a presiding officer who gave me an extraordinarily rough time, so it is a pleasure to see you back in the Chair. If it is any consolation, I have made sure I have given him an extraordinarily rough time in Cabinet since then!

20 Mr Speaker, the time since this Parliament last met has been one that will be talked of for many years. It has been a time that will be referred to in our history for generations to come. When we adjourned *sine die* last time, my final words to the Parliament then were that the community should brace itself. It is quite something that the senior elected political leader of this community had to use those words in peacetime in this House, but that is where we were

25 on 20th March of this year. We knew that we were as ready as possible then for the arrival of a
wave of COVID-19 in Gibraltar. We knew that we had to hope for the best and we knew that we
were prepared for the worst. But even in that situation we were clear: we did not want to lose
any Gibraltarian or any resident of Gibraltar to the coronavirus. And now we know that we have
not. I would just say that unfortunately we are aware of at least one case in which a Gibraltarian
was lost to COVID away from Gibraltar. It is no consolation for us that one of our people has
30 succumbed to the virus, even if this was far from our shores.

As we left this place in late March, the Government had come before the House in high gear;
we left to move into even higher gear, probably the highest gear in which a Government has had
to operate in the period of civilian government in Gibraltar. I make no apology for again praising
the public sector for the way it has reacted to the call for action that we had cause to undertake.
35 Indeed, I want to tell the House that the reaction of Gibraltar to this crisis has been exemplary,
and it is not just us who say so: advisers to the World Health Organization have said so. In this
week's edition of *The Economist* there is praise for Gibraltar in two separate articles for the
introduction of our golden hour for our golden generation, the over-70s. The proof of that is not
just in speech, in an article, in an argument, or any metaphysical aspect; it is in the pudding of
40 reality. It is in the absence of casualties to date from the virus in our community, it is in the fact
that our Health Services were not overwhelmed and it is in the extraordinarily low numbers of
infections that we have seen reported amongst the resident population.

Even now, as we are doing even more random testing than most places in the world, we are
seeing almost no community transmissions, yet in those early days, as we braced, we had no
45 crystal ball to point us to the extraordinary success that we have now seen to date. In fact, we
had every indicator pointing in the direction of massive potential casualties. We had every
reason to fear that we might have lost many of our most loved ones, in particular in the
vulnerable demographic sectors, and we had every reason to work harder than ever to preserve
the lives of our fellow countrymen.

Life was turned upside down. First, restaurants and bars were closed from 8 p.m., no mean
feat as we actually did that on a Friday afternoon. Yet we saw everyone comply. The importance
of complying, of working for Team Gibraltar rather than for personal profit at stake, was clear to
every operator. All responded admirably, despite the likelihood of huge financial losses as a
result. The Cabinet met over the weekend together with the Leader of the Opposition, who was
55 present for our deliberations. We resolved to pass regulations to confine our over-70s. We
declared a major incident and established tiers of command and reporting. We closed catering
establishments completely, not just after 8 p.m.

We introduced a daily text message from the Government to ensure that the issue of the
numbers of infections was not one for unhinged speculation on social media. That continues to
60 this day and has proven the reliable index of numbers for our people when it comes to the
prevalence of the virus in our community. I want to thank Gibtelecom for that excellent work.
We produced a daily press conference where these numbers were provided to the public and
broadcast to the whole nation by the national broadcaster GBC. I want to thank the men and
women of GBC for really stepping up. A daily live press conference was an unimaginable
65 standard for us all before this emergency, but we achieved it. Newspapers stepped up and
introduced free deliveries for the over-70s in Government elderly housing. Thank you to them
too for the information and entertainment they will have provided. I personally record the
thanks of the people of Gibraltar to editors Brian Reyes of the *Gibraltar Chronicle* and Joe Garcia
Sr of *Panorama* for their magnificent initiatives.

70 So, everyone was working together, clubbing together to get through this in a way that was
designed to ensure that we were all rowing in the same direction, undistracted from the main
matter at hand.

We developed a Nightingale hospital ward from scratch. Particular thanks to Stuart Bensadon
and his team for the work they did on that, as well as the Royal Gibraltar Regiment, who under a
75 MACA request assisted also. We opened a new ICU, which is, mercifully, now closed.

We were on the cusp of a Government of national unity. It is worth just pausing over that issue in this place, Mr Speaker. The enormity of what we were facing was such that we were both, Government and Opposition, ready to consider that possibility. Today, in the sunny uplands of late May with no casualties to COVID, some might wonder and not understand how we might even have considered that, but it is important to look at where we were.

We were looking at estimates of hundreds or thousands of Gibraltarians dead in a period of a few short weeks or months. We had to develop the capability to bury mass numbers of people, we had to develop a new morgue facility, we had to stop religious worship, and on 23rd March we locked down our whole population. We restricted civil liberties in a way I would never have wished to, but which became essential. We restricted rights that I had sworn an oath to protect and we restricted the operation of those parts of our Constitution which we have fought through the decades, as the civilian inhabitants of this once military fortress, to enjoy. But it had to be done and our people have almost universally understood and accepted that. This is the first time in our history that the civilian authorities of Gibraltar have restricted the movement of Gibraltarians in Gibraltar.

It was in that dramatic, developing context that the two historic political rivals, the GSLP Liberals and the GSD, downed political weapons. We worked together. I understood the importance of reaching out to my opposite number on the Opposition benches and the Hon. the Leader of the Opposition understood the importance of accepting our call. If the worst of the events we had been told to expect had come to pass, we would today likely be sitting in Government together. I had cleared with His Excellency the Governor – and I think it is important to record in this House – and had communicated to the Leader of the Opposition that a proper interpretation of the Constitution permitted the appointment of 10 Ministers alongside a Chief Minister. I was therefore able to bring Mr Azopardi in as a Minister without having to remove one of the existing portfolio holders.

We were close, but in the end it was, happily, not necessary – not because we would not have been able to work together, but because we did not see the worst materialise and we found also a way of working together without that final step. We were, I think, both pleased to have been able to avoid crossing that Rubicon, but it is an illustration of just how dangerous the position potentially was. A GSLP Chief Minister was considering offering executive responsibility in a GSLP Liberal Government to a GSD leader, and, to boot, one of the team of 1996.

It saddens me, Mr Speaker, when I read ill-informed comment by a few ill-informed commentators that suggests that this has been a low period for our democracy. The opposite is true, and anyone who understands the detail of democracy understands that it requires moments of unity and not that in key moments people should continue to oppose for the sake of it, as if that were a necessary mark or criterion for democracy. There is time for all that. There is also time for unity.

I thank hon. Members opposite for their support, and the Hon. Leader of the Opposition in particular. I invited him to address our people alongside me in a press conference at No. 6 Convent Place in a fitting, historic, visual representation of the unity that we achieved in the common front that we have maintained. That moment, I think, is one that will live on in the political history of our nation for many generations, as it was as unlikely before as it was unprecedented. As I said in the last meeting, we must try to galvanise the spirit of co-operation going forward, if only to purge our debate of the more personal reflections we have seen in the past. But I am a realist too: let's see whether we can at least avoid calling each other names for the next few hours.

As the Government and the Opposition worked together, so did many other sectors. The COVID Economic Liaison and Advisory Council, which I established as a result of the Emergency Budget that I brought to this House at the last session, has included representatives of sometimes competing interests. Unions and business representatives' organisations have worked together to advise the Government in a way that has been selfless. Select members are not short of commitments themselves, but they have been attending meetings assiduously

130 although the meetings are lengthy, and all of them have given their time. Each has batted for
their own organisation but with a 'Gibraltar first' attitude, which is commendable and which I
refer to this House for that reason. I thank all members of that Committee on behalf of the
Government and people of Gibraltar. They helped us to develop our measures for business and
our Beat COVID measures to put a shield around employees and employment in this difficult
135 time. We were able to agree those also with the Leader of the Opposition and the Hon.
Mr Clinton, and the machinery of Government delivered on those new commitments and
obligations in a remarkable way, publishing regulations and guidance notes in record time and
translated indeed into various relevant languages – a remarkable effort led by the Financial
Secretary, the Commissioner of Income Tax, the Director of Employment and the Accountant
General. Their teams have been better than superb – as have our Government Law Officers, who
140 have been called upon to draft regulations at short notice in the period of the last 12 weeks.

140 In this time, Mr Speaker, I have met with the Prime Minister and spoken to the Foreign
Secretary and the Minister for Europe, the latter on a number of occasions. I have spoken also to
the Spanish Minister for the Interior and to the Spanish Foreign Secretary, as well as to the
President of the Junta de Andalucía. Political contact has been fluid and the Frontier has not
been a choke point in a manner that has been designed to prejudice Gibraltar, as it might have
145 been in the past. That too is an enormous success.

And so now, as we reflect on where we are, how we managed to get here and how we will
move forward, it is clear that there is much to do. We are already working on a new 'Unlock the
Rock' document, a second document from the Restart and Recover Task Force, which will be
issued in early July and will deal with the process to come as from Rock Unlocked on 1st August.
150 I anticipate a final part of the Unlock the Rock series, which will be a third instalment that will be
delivered in late summer and will be from Task Force Future.

We will have to consider together how we deal with the extended financial year, which is
now programmed to run to the end of September, and we will shortly be announcing how we
propose to continue to support businesses and individuals beyond 30th June. I do not, however,
155 want to anticipate questions on the order paper that we have which deal with the Beat COVID
measures.

Mr Speaker, I have said many thanks already in the context of the past few weeks; I have said
many thanks already in the context of this speech. I have many more thanks to give, in particular
to some in the public sector who are not often seen but who have demonstrated how essential
160 they are to the smooth working of Gibraltar, even in these difficult times – from refuse collectors
to our port operators and our port launch crew, our teachers, our LSAs, our cleaners. All of
them, the professional grades, the technical grades, everyone has given their best. The best of
Gibraltar have given their best to Gibraltar and we have seen the best of the Gibraltarian in
these times. That is what has delivered success. I hope we will continue to see that from every
165 sector in our community.

But there are there are hidden gems of things that have happened in the past 12 weeks that I
hope we will be able to shed more light on in coming days and weeks. For example, the small
private plane that flew directly to China and from China to Gibraltar to bring us PPE when it was
not available anywhere else. It was piloted by a Gibraltarian, by Mark Carreras – twice, to China
170 and back. These are remarkable achievements that are not on the front pages of our
newspapers but must be at the forefront of our minds as we understand how we have achieved
what we have achieved in the past 12 weeks.

The staff of our Civil Contingencies Committee have been absolutely remarkable. Ivor Lopez,
Wayne Barton, Tito Danino and Brian Brooks have been, I think, permanently in our Civil
175 Contingencies bunker at No. 6, in the Situation Room.

And indeed the work that has been done in the GHA. My interface in the GHA is the Minister
for Health, Paul Balban, but everyone in the GHA – Krishna Rawal the acting Medical Director,
Sohail Bhatti the Director of Public Health, and every single person in the GHA from the cleaners

180 to the security guards, to the doctors, to the nurses, every single level of responsibility in the GHA – has stepped forward and been ready to help Gibraltar through this process.

We need to understand that there are people in what we call the COVID ICU, or the Dirty ICU, or the COVID John Ward, who were waiting for the virus to arrive, to deal with it. Whilst we were shying away from it and trying to shield ourselves from it, there is a group of Gibraltarians who stood ready to face the virus and to ask for it to be brought to them so that they could work to save the lives of those suffering with the virus. That is remarkable bravery: much greater
185 bravery than standing up to make an argument in a rarefied place like this, much greater bravery than sitting at the head of a Platinum Command and making decisions which one is asked to make. This is frontline bravery and this House must recognise that. We must recognise it in a more permanent way than just in these speeches, and I will be inviting the Leader of the
190 Opposition to consider with me how we might do that in coming weeks and months.

And then the people who supported the GHA – for example, all those who went out of their way to make a contribution to the GHA, those associations who decided that they wanted to put their hands in their collective or personal pockets, because so many individuals did so too, and they wanted to give. Health authorities around the world were saying none of us has enough
195 ventilators in order to deal with these issues, and people suddenly thought, ‘Well, how can I help to get a ventilator? How can I help to get PPE?’ The remarkable inflow of unsolicited moneys to the GHA has been absolutely incredible. And then indeed, whether it is GBC who organised an ad hoc open day and collected over £100,000 – I think it was £178,000 – in addition to everything else, this support is more than just remarkable. Really, whether it is that or the
200 rainbow postcard received by some in our GHA from seven-year-olds and 70-year-olds, the support has been absolutely remarkable.

It really does make one wonder whether the heroes of the modern world are not the guys who kick the ball in the gladiatorial arena of football but the guys who save lives wearing their PPE in great discomfort in the hospitals of the world.

205 And then, moving on to other work done, for example by our Civil Contingencies team and the Moroccan Community Association, Ali Douissi, and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office all working together to ensure two extractions from Morocco, one of them brought to Gibraltar by the port launch crew and the RGP launch crew. That has been absolutely remarkable work and seeing that in action has demonstrated what this community is capable of when it needs to be
210 capable of it.

It is absolutely right, therefore, that the many sung and unsung heroes of the past 12 weeks should be recognised for the work that they have done, and that is why I think it would be appropriate for this Parliament to recognise that in some appropriate way.

Mr Speaker, too often I spend time thanking those who have been on the front line – or not
215 too often, because I cannot do it too often – but it is incumbent on me also to make a personal reflection of thanks to all who sit on these benches alongside me, to all of the Ministers I have been working with. The Cabinet that was forged in the trenches of Brexit was ready to deliver this success in the battle against COVID because we are a team that works together, and work is what has most defined every one of the people who sit alongside me on these benches
220 in the past 12 weeks.

If I had to single out two individuals in particular, it would, of course, be the Minister for Health and the Minister for Civil Contingencies. I do not know that Samantha Sacramento has actually slept in the past 12 weeks, but she has certainly been there every moment of every
225 working day with every regulation to hand, ready to be the interface with the Leader of the Opposition as regulations had to be published quickly and we needed feedback because we wanted to act together; or Paul Balban, who I think probably enjoyed the use of one of those 170-odd beds that we had available in the Hospital alongside his team; together with the Minister for Public Health, John Cortes, who has understood the science better than most of us in the context of how this virus arrived and developed, and was our early-warning system in the
230 Cabinet on the subject of what at one stage might have looked like a bad flu season coming in

our direction; and all other Ministers who have been dealing with issues, whether in terms of financial services and economic development, like Albert Isola and Sir Joe Bossano, the front line of Education, Mr Licudi – who I am starting to forgive for his time as presiding officer – and now on the front line of our fight against pollution is not the Minister for the Environment but the
235 Minister for Transport, who I think is relishing the argument that will help us deliver a better and greener Gibraltar; and, Mr Speaker, if you have looked at the Unlock the Rock document, probably the longest section, unexpectedly, is the section that deals with sport, which has its own intricacies and has been a difficult issue to deal with. So, my thanks to all of them. Of course, there is one person who has been with me every step of the way, and that is the Deputy
240 Chief Minister.

It is true that this has been a time of great stress for those who have been confined at home, for those with concerns about their businesses and for those of us who are in Government. It has been a time of great strain for the whole economy and for the whole community, but now I think it is time that we should also reflect that this is a time of great success. We cannot let our
245 guard down. Our advice has not changed. It is safer to stay at home if one is not out of work, if there is no other good reason to be out, but that is the way that we have beaten this first round with the virus and it will be the way that we beat the virus in every round. It is extraordinary that we have reached this stage with no casualties, it is extraordinary what we have seen Gibraltar do, but there is still the fact that there is a lot of work to do. That does not hide the fact that
250 Gibraltar is an extraordinary place, and long may that continue to be the case for all of us.

Now the work begins to develop those economic support mechanisms for all our businesses and to continue to try and see as low a set of casualties to unemployment as possible. It is going to be difficult, and the work that the COVID Emergency Liaison and Advisory Committee (CELAC) is doing now is going to be almost as important as the work that it has done, and I do hope that
255 we will be able to move forward together in this House on those issues. I expect to have feedback from CELAC on a number of new proposals by the end of this week and then I expect to be able to sit down with the Leader of the Opposition and Mr Clinton to consult them on those new proposed measures. Those will be the measures that go beyond 30th June, the period for which we have agreed the Beat COVID mechanisms.

Mr Speaker, what is ahead of us might be even more daunting than what is now behind us. There is an opportunity for a new future, a new future that will require courage and it will require bravery. It will be very easy to fall on the old ways, to pander to the popular and to not take the steps that are the right steps for our community. We are not elected to pander to the popular. We need to move away from that which is just comfortable and we need to stretch
265 ourselves. Perhaps we have stretched ourselves more than anybody expected already in the way that we beat our political weapons into ploughshares and delivered the best of each of us in the past 12 weeks. There is an opportunity to do that. There is a requirement to do that. Gibraltar, I think, is clamouring for us to do that as we go forward in this House.

Before I sit down it is incumbent on me to put on the record of this House the solidarity of
270 the people of Gibraltar with those nations around us that have lost citizens to COVID-19 and to those all around the world – whether it is in China, where this began, in Italy, where we saw it explode in Europe, in our neighbouring Spain, or indeed in the United Kingdom or in Morocco. Everywhere in the world that has suffered loss to COVID must understand that they have the solidarity of this small nation that has not, to date, lost anyone to COVID.

Mr Speaker, the Hon. Mr Licudi, when he was in your Chair as we rose to adjourn *sine die*,
275 told us last time that COVID was the battle we faced and it was a battle we will win. Twelve weeks on, we are ahead on points. *(Banging on desks)*

Hon. K Azopardi: I too want to welcome the return of Parliament. It has been a long time but an understandable interregnum because of the reasons that the Chief Minister has indicated –
280 and to welcome your return in particular, not that of course the Hon. Mr Licudi did not do a good job. Indeed, it has been remarked that he perhaps did a very good job. But we welcome

you. Your absence last time was for good reason. At the time, it was a very sensitive period for Gibraltar and we certainly like to see you back in that Chair this morning.

285 I also agree that this has been a historic period and it is important to understand and to reflect on that historical significance, because when you are in a moment that decades later will be described as historic, sometimes it is not particularly seen, but in years to come I believe that people will reflect on this particular period, how we dealt with it as a community, and then of course issue a verdict as to whether it was good or bad. Certainly I am not going to give that verdict today. Historians will do so. I hope they view how we dealt with that crisis in a favourable way.

290 I concur with the Chief Minister's remarks and I also express our solidarity on this side of the House – speaking for the GSD Opposition – with other nations who have lost so many lives. Yesterday, the United States was about to tip into 100,000 deaths. There was a programme on CNN about all the different stories of people who had lost their lives – and they were not just the vulnerable, of course; there were people in their 40s who ostensibly were healthy people. And so I think we have been graced, so far – and I say 'so far' – by the fact that we have not had any fatalities. The verdict, as far as I am concerned, is so far so good, and I think it is important, when we come to address that issue, not to lose sight, not to go crazy and not to misunderstand the moment we are at. The moment is not as dark as it was, but it still requires sensitive management going forward, and that is an important theme that people need to understand when they listen to the politicians of the day and indeed the messaging that is going out there.

300 As the Chief Minister has done, I also reflect on where we were on 13th March when he called me to have a discussion about the possibility of co-operation with the Opposition. That was a moment where the Government opened up to us the scientific modelling and advice it was receiving as to the kind of hospitalisation and fatalities that it was being advised might be possible. If we think about where we were at that stage, it was 10 days after the first confirmed case in Gibraltar. We had, two days before, in the Opposition issued a press release asking for comprehensive testing to be adopted as a policy of the Government. At that stage there had only been 49 tests in Gibraltar.

310 When we met the Chief Minister and he described that to us, I was certainly left in no doubt about the potential for a really dark storm in Gibraltar, a really dark period that we had never, as a community, had to grapple with – certainly not something like this. This community has dealt with military sieges, it has dealt with political sieges, it has dealt with war, but it has never dealt with that kind of deep public health crisis in that way – at least in the 20th century, or at least not since the Spanish flu of the early years of the 20th century – and certainly not dealt with by local politicians because of course the last time there was the Spanish flu of that magnitude, local institutions had not developed and there was not even a legislature for Gibraltar.

320 So, yes, when the shadow Cabinet considered that, on 14th March, we took an early view that it was absolutely necessary for us to co-operate and work with the Government on these matters, and so I attended the special Cabinet meetings to which I was invited and we discussed the social and commercial lockdown. As everyone knows, we came to this House a week later to support an Emergency Budget, at the request of the Government, to kick forward that which would have been absolutely necessary in an unprecedented way so that the Government could concentrate on dealing with the public health crisis.

325 We have been working on economic measures, on public health measures and on civil contingency matters, and all my colleagues have been engaged in those discussions at different measure.

330 During those early days the Chief Minister and I were in daily contact, sometimes more often than once, sometimes frequently. Certainly during the period between mid-March and the end of April, and leading up to the publication of the Unlock the Rock document, it was very frequent. I believe we have worked well. There have been testy moments that I have described – I have been asked by journalists before on this a couple of times, but I do not think it is helpful to describe what those were – but it has been a mark of the process that we have been engaged in.

335 I have to say this, because in the context of the Chief Minister's comments on the
Government of national unity that he would have considered ... He did mention it at the time
that we described. We had the session on the Emergency Budget and indeed we had a
discussion about the constitutional interpretation of that particular section of the Constitution
and so on, but of course we never reached the point where there was an offer inviting us to
340 form part of a national unity Government and none had to be considered. If there had been an
offer, it would have first had to have been considered by the shadow Cabinet and then indeed
the executive of the party, but of course it was not necessary. And the Chief Minister will know
that my reaction in those brief discussions that we had on the issue was simply 'I hope that it is
not necessary', because indeed it would have been a bad sign – not a bad sign in terms of
whether we could work together, but a bad sign of where Gibraltar was that we had had to have
345 contemplated a Government of national unity.

I just take up also a comment that I read in the *Chronicle* this morning where my friend Miss
Hassan Nahon was observed, or at least reported, to have said on the reconvening of Parliament
that the GSD and the Government had had unity over the last few weeks. I have to say, with all
due respect to my good friend, she is wrong in that because there is a big distinction between
350 what I believe we have done over the last 80 days – which is the politics of co-operation – and
the politics of unity. There is a big difference between a government of national unity, where
you accept an offer ... First the offer has to be tendered, then it has to be accepted, and then
you in effect merge into the executive and you accept the collective responsibility of that
because you are a member of that government. We have not done that. We have had the
355 politics of co-operation and the public interest, always reserving the right to disagree, always
reserving the right to disagree publicly; and the decisions, while we have been consulted, were
decisions of the Cabinet. I may have attended, but the decisions themselves were not decisions
on which I voted, because of course they are the decisions of the Government and we are not
part of that Government.

360 That is not to say that I disagreed. Indeed, there were a lot of those decisions that I agreed. I
entirely agreed, on behalf of myself and indeed my colleagues, with many of those decisions
that were taken, especially in relation to the social lockdown and the commercial lockdown –
they were absolutely necessary, I have said so publicly – but there is a distinction to be made
between what we did, which is the politics of co-operation in the public interest and indeed a
365 Government of national unity, and it is important that people understand that.

In the context of that, of course, I do want to also say that, in the same way as he has done, I
acknowledge the attitude of the Chief Minister in first tendering that invitation to work with the
Opposition, and indeed his attitude throughout. Even at the most testy moments I think we have
found a way to at least defuse things when we have disagreed on a number of issues, but we
370 have, I think, demonstrated that there has been a co-operative stance and I acknowledge his co-
operative stance in providing information, submitting to that process and indeed receptiveness
to the ideas that we had given him as Opposition, because I also understand that they are the
Government. They have been elected, not that long ago, as the Government. We had just come
out of an electoral process. It was for him to make the first move and I acknowledge that he did
375 that, and indeed the efforts of other Ministers in liaising with us and providing information
openly, and positively engaging with us when we agreed and when we did not agree.

I also want to thank frontline staff, and I have done so on a number of occasions. I think it is
important that this House recognises formally on the record our thanks to essential workers and
public servants, and indeed, above all, people who were so disciplined. But I will say this, and I
380 think it is important for us to do that: this is only the first phase. We have done very well. It is
important not to chant victory, if I can paraphrase a Spanish saying, because we are not there
yet. Indeed, proof of it is that we have social distancing measures in Parliament today. This is not
the back benches as I would have imagined it, Mr Speaker. I would have preferred different
backbenchers. (*Laughter*) I certainly do not envisage any of the colleagues who sit behind me on

385 the back benches! Perhaps that is for the future – we will have better parliamentary reform.
(*Interjection*) I absolutely want to, on the front bench, yes.

I think the proof of it is that that is where we are as a community and it is important for there to be consistent social messaging. And indeed, if I may say, as an aside – the tone has been positive and I am going to say this in as positive a spirit as possible for the Chief Minister – I do
390 think it is important that messaging is consistent and then adhered to, so that people are aware of what the position is and that there is no confusion. I have to say I did think that whoever drafted the press release yesterday, where there is a particular line in the Government press release that says that it is irresponsible to go to the beach before the bathing season, I think, probably overstepped that mark, I have to say because at the end of the day the Unlock the Rock
395 document does say that you can go to the beach for 30 minutes. All the messaging has said that.

I will just tell the Chief Minister a little story. I think people might have been a bit baffled, actually, by that line. I went for a walk to Sandy Bay on Saturday and I zealously wanted to be very careful that I stuck to the Public Health advice, so I actually timed myself on the stopwatch. I got engaged in a conversation with someone when I was on the sand and it took so long that by
400 the time I looked at my watch I was at 27 minutes – I had not had time to even take my shoes off – so I then left the beach, in accordance with the Public Health advice, but I have to say to him that there was at least one Member of the Government there in his shorts, wading in the sea. And so I think it is important that we all follow ... If the advice is 30 minutes, it is okay, but we should not say ‘irresponsible’, because that confuses people. That is all. I say it in the best
405 spirit possible to the hon. Member.

I do agree, as the hon. Member says, that we are at a sensitive moment, because, looking forward – the work that we have done with my hon. colleague Mr Clinton and indeed the Government – the economic management of this is going to be as treacherous as the public health management. Certainly we are alive to that. It is going to be compounded, probably, by
410 Brexit; that has not gone away and that is always going to be there. The revenue is going to be dented – consumer confidence globally has been dented – and so will the markets, and businesses will need more help. I think we both agree that, going forward, when the ‘Beat’ measures finish on 30th June, we will need to revise and think about how we do that. Indeed, proportionality of measures will need to be kept in active review, depending on where we are as
415 a community in the management of the public health crisis – and all of that is acknowledged.

In the same way as the Chief Minister has reflected on that moment of the possibility of national unity because of where we were in mid-March, I also want to add these reflections, if I may, on that. It struck me yesterday, because I was watching the coverage on the *Telediario* about the Spanish session in parliament yesterday, where it was either accusations that people
420 were almost quasi terrorists or undermining democracy or calling for insurgents ... The vitriol was such that I just do not know ... I sometimes watch that and I think, ‘Really, is that the best for your particular country?’ Of course, I make no comment. In Spain, the political panorama is such that people need to make their own decisions. I am not pretending for a moment to give lessons to people as to how they should behave, but I will say this: that in comparison with that,
425 over the last 80 days I believe we have been able to work together in this place in a way that other countries have not. I think that has been important and I hope that the verdict of history is favourable to us doing that – so different to how perhaps other countries have conducted a process.

When people say to me, ‘Why haven’t you shouted from the rooftops and asked for information publicly?’ and so on, invariably it is because the Government has provided the
430 information when we have asked, or accepted our ideas, or indeed accepted our comments on matters on which we have been consulted, and people need to understand that. People also need to understand this: anyone who knows me, or indeed my colleagues, would be surprised to think that we are going to submissively participate in a process as lambs. I think that we all know
435 each other well enough to understand that when we agree we do so, but when we disagree we are not afraid of saying so – we know each other well enough – and I think at the end of the day

the whole point of the process of co-operation is not just to sit there like silent lemons but to actually participate in a proactive and vigorous way. It is no different to being in a Council of Ministers. The idea that when I was in Government, or indeed my colleagues who served in
440 Government sat as lemons in the GSD Cabinet really is not to understand how the political process works.

There are some people who have made observations about what this has meant for politics, but I have to say that those who say that democracy was impoverished by these events, in my view, underplay both the magnitude of the threat that we were in and do not understand the
445 role of a responsible Opposition. A responsible Opposition has to make a judgement. A responsible Opposition needs to understand what is in the interests of this community. A responsible Opposition understands that politics is not about being at loggerheads for the sake of being at loggerheads. Politics is about outcomes. Politics is about ensuring that our people do the best possible, that we save lives. If the invitation is out there for us to work together at a
450 critical time in the history of our nation, for us to save lives, taking the alternative of the Partido Popular would have been not only callous but a mistake that would never have been forgiven, in my view, by this community, and should not be forgiven.

And so, when people say, 'Where is the Opposition?' I say, 'Doing its job, (*Banging on desks*) doing the job it was elected to do, which is to make a judgement and decide when it is in the
455 public interest to work together,' because there are issues like that. We can fight about traffic. We can fight about parking fees. We are going to criticise the Government on a number of issues going forward, but there are issues as well where, in the public interest, it is important to work together. I have said that before, and I appreciate that some people might not have believed me because it was never put to the test, but now it has been put to the test, so I hope now that
460 people understand that when the GSD Opposition that I lead says that we are willing to work together with the Government on issues of public interest, if we make that judgement, we will do so in a serious way. That does not mean that we are becoming the Government, because we are not. We are going to retain our role as Opposition. We are going to be robust and formidable, we are going to test those ideas, we are going to provide our own input, and at the
465 end of the day we hope that that delivers better outcomes for people. Otherwise, people who criticise us for doing that confuse the process with the outcome, as if it were better just to be at loggerheads, to have the destructive negativity just for the sake of it.

Mr Speaker, in this crisis we all had a brother or a sister or a parent or a daughter or a son who could have been affected by COVID. When we met in mid-March and we were faced with
470 that reality, people were losing their lives in droves in every single country of the world – countries that had the most sophisticated medical services around. It was impossible to believe that we were going to buck the statistical trend, and yet here we are. And so of course when we make the judgement of whether we co-operate or not, we made the judgement in the circumstances that we found ourselves in mid-March. It is important, always, never to read
475 history backwards, as I say often enough for people to listen to me. The Hon. Deputy Chief Minister, as a historian, knows that that is the first thing we were taught in our History A-level and universities.

I believe that the vast majority of people welcome that we worked together in the interests of this community, and we will go back to normal politics soon enough. Indeed, we are already
480 doing so because the level of engagement between the Government and the Opposition has lessened significantly from the beginning of May until now, and that is understandable and normal. We all want to get back to normality; otherwise, the Chief Minister would have to make that offer to join his Cabinet that I would have to decline because the circumstances do not warrant it and I treasure my role and privilege as Leader of the Opposition, for the time being.
485 (*Interjection*) Yes, until the next election, when I hope to replace the hon. Member.

Mr Speaker, I agree with the Chief Minister that there are opportunities going forward and indeed there are still big issues on the horizon. The fact that we disagree on things is not a good reason for lack of engagement. Indeed, it is probably the best reason for engagement because if

we agreed with everything that the Government did then there would be no reason to engage
490 with us, because we add no value. The importance about adding value is that we actually believe
different things and see things differently, and may have different perspectives on things. We
may agree on certain things, but we also have different perspectives. And so yes, I do agree it is
an opportunity going forward and it is for us in this House to show that leadership and recoil
from populism. There is an opportunity for a new radicalism, as long as it is done properly – a
495 new radicalism that can be transformative. There is that opportunity. I believe there is nothing
to be afraid of in that.

I also want to thank my colleagues on this side of the House for the work that they have done
in the last couple of months, in particular Daniel Feetham, of course, on civil contingencies; my
friend Elliott Phillips on health and environment matters; Damon Bossino on financial services,
500 Port and shipping issues; Edwin Reyes on educational matters, which we have discussed very
closely because it is such an important aspect of the unlock process, as it was of the lock
process; and in particular, of course, Roy Clinton, who has been by my side in the discussions
always on public finances as indeed he is our guru on that side of things.

Mr Speaker, we emerge from the first phase and it is important to do a balance sheet, and in
505 that balance sheet I have made my comments of where we are. I think we should be cautious as
we go forward, learn the lessons and stay vigilant. There is much to do. Indeed, what concerns
me particularly, which I have shared with the Chief Minister, is the period of the late summer,
when after borders may open there may be transmission of further cases. That should not scare
us, because of course more human interactivity will do that, but the rise of cases needs to be
510 closely monitored and it does concern me where we will find ourselves in late summer or early
September.

So, we all need to be vigilant. That is the message: cautious, vigilant, adhere to the social
distancing guidelines and the Public Health advice. Let us restore freedoms in a measured,
responsible and careful way, because we all want that to happen. Let's ensure this community
515 survives in a sustainable, environmental and economic way, because there is much to be done in
the second phase. (*Banging on desks*)

Mr Speaker: The Hon. Marlene Hassan Nahon.

520 **Hon. Ms M D Hassan Nahon:** Mr Speaker, thank you.

It is with the greatest sense of gratitude and relief that I stand here today, wanting to thank
everyone in our Government and on the front line – the Health Service in particular and others
in all the essential services, and those across our community – for their integral part in
preventing what could have been a very disastrous first wave during this ongoing pandemic.

525 In few places across the world have we seen prepared, empty field hospitals and a stock of
unused ventilators because there was no practical crisis despite reasoned expectations via
modelling carried out by trained public health experts. This is certainly something to be proud of
and something which is a clear indication that we have done a lot of things right.

I do, however, emphasise *ongoing* pandemic, because our work is still far from done and I
530 urge every member of our community to take heed of the necessary actions and precautions to
ensure our well-being. My plea is to continue to listen, to comply with the much-needed
recommendations that will allow us to safely navigate through these difficult times.

However, unfortunately this also leaves me somewhat puzzled as to why I stand here today
having to remind us about the role and the significance of the entire opposition, and not just
535 one part of it, in an effective parliamentary democracy. A compliant community also needs a
representation and a voice. A crisis such as this pandemic calls for heightened awareness,
maximum representation and scrutiny to ensure the common good.

My party suffered, as a consequence, being left out of many cross-party briefings and
meetings between the Government and the Opposition. The 20-plus percent of the electorate
540 that entrusted me and my party to defend their interest was left banished from the discussions

on the management of the pandemic, a move that sadly, or maybe even conveniently, was never protested by the official Leader of the Opposition; all the while, Government professing the importance of not playing party politics. This does not reflect a truly strong, constructive and representative Parliament.

545 We were given a diluted democratic voice during this crisis, but we were not silenced as a watchdog of public interests. Our loyalty and sights firmly set on the common good, constructively we decided to make our voices heard loud and clear. We voted in favour of granting Government all the extra powers it asked for, but being left out of key discussions did not mean we would stop doing what we felt our community needed. We voiced our concerns,
550 which demanded stricter and earlier social distancing measures, the closure of schools, more robust and inclusive economic support measures, something which should have been brought to the table by us much earlier on. We also insisted on more and better use of PPE and on the implementation of better testing protocols.

Listening and speaking to our constituents despite not being allowed to bring their concerns
555 to the table felt wholly undemocratic. Nevertheless, we were ahead of the curve at every juncture, pushing for measures that we, as well as most other nations, have eventually implemented. Our attitude towards the handling of the pandemic has been consistently one of proactive and constructive criticism, pushing Government to do more and to do better, and we believe that we have made a humble yet meaningful contribution to the success we have
560 enjoyed thus far.

With this situation being far from over in epidemiological terms ... Strict lockdowns, despite being costly and traumatic, are easy to implement. They are also tried and tested ways to stop the spread of the disease. The real challenges begin now, as we unlock the Rock as per the Government's guidelines. We must engage with our electorate fully, addressing majority and
565 minority concerns as efficiently as possible, because it pains me to say this but the current unlocking strategy feels like it is beginning to fall apart. It feels like it is beginning to fall apart for many reasons but mainly for the ones we have already expressed publicly: mixed messaging and lack of enforcement.

The general attitude in town is that the pandemic is over, that the job is done and that the
570 risk is negligible. The use of face masks is derided and mocked. The two metres social distancing is flouted by pretty much everyone, including many of our public workers and politicians, and there is simply very little fear of COVID-19.

I am afraid we cannot blame the general population for this dangerous misconception. We
575 have to blame ourselves because we, as politicians, need to lead by example. The message failure that has led us to a situation where we no longer have any fear of this disease needs to be rectified, because at present we are unprepared to safely start living with a virus that is still deadly and is still among us.

If we look back to mid-March, first we were on our way to herd immunity. COVID-19 was
580 little more than a flu that was going to move through our community. We even celebrated that some healthcare workers were catching it and thus developing a first line of defence. Then, as disaster struck in other countries and UK public health advice was tragically debunked, we moved to a strategy of suppression, urging people to stay at home and protect themselves as much as possible from catching the virus. But did we admit our early advice was wrong? Did we say openly that we had made a mistake or followed the wrong advice, that we did not want the
585 virus to go through the community at all anymore? No, we did not. We pretended mitigation and suppression were one and the same thing, and many people are still caught up in that confusion.

As for social distancing, we advise but we do not enforce. We do not fine or demand
590 adherence to norms. We tell people masks are good, but we ask them to use their common sense. We tell them to distance, but we take pictures in hospitals and indoor spaces surrounded by people without masks or without adequate distancing. This is not how we unlock the Rock safely. Right now our concern as a party, and that of many of our constituents, is a lot of fear

that we are heading straight into a second spike of cases when we had done so well controlling the first wave.

595 We need to end this ambiguity, the beach a clear example which we raised last week and which has now been echoed by the Leader of the Opposition. It is open and legal but the Government does not expect people to go. It is hot, there are people off work, there are students off school, but there are no security measures to protect people in an emergency. We need clear, strict rules, coherent messages and a degree of enforcement of the rules if we are to
600 make a success of this most challenging phase of the pandemic.

I carry the suggestions and concerns of our civil society and community to this Parliament and I invite Government to engage with me whenever they decide to acknowledge that reality. The opposition voice is here to echo the voice of the people in a society which truly needs us to act inclusively and effectively. We want to do the right thing for Gibraltar with coherence and
605 conviction.

I thank again the Government for its efforts and success so far and remind them that I stand available to roll up my sleeves whenever called for in order to help our community in any way I can to get through the crisis.

On a separate note, it is regrettable to have noted that we have not actually paid tribute to the late Frank Delipiani by a minute's silence or some kind of words for a man who was a
610 Minister for many years, as we have done with many others. We always do it at the beginning of every session. (*Interjection*) Well, I am letting you know. Excuse me – the Minister behind you is mocking me with gesticulations. We are not in a nursery; we are a Parliament.

Thank you very much, Mr Speaker.

615

Mr Speaker: The Hon. the Deputy Chief Minister.

Deputy Chief Minister (Hon. Dr J J Garcia): Mr Speaker, following on from the statement made by my hon. Friend the Chief Minister, I welcome the opportunity to make a number of points for the purposes of *Hansard*.

This House last sat two months ago, on 20th March. We debated and approved an Appropriation Bill and we voted to extend the financial year. Members agreed to take those
620 extraordinary measures in the face of an abnormal situation. We did so in a calm, rational and logical manner and in a display of political unity, and I want to acknowledge the input from the Members opposite, in particular from the Leader of the Opposition.

Gibraltarians have united in the face of unity before. This is not the first time; also, it will not be the last. Once more we have stood shoulder to shoulder against an external threat, an
625 unusual threat nonetheless, it must be said: a virus, a peril that you cannot see coming, in fact you cannot see it at all. This cowardly virus was poised then to target our elderly and attack our vulnerable. It represented a threat to life itself. A simple look around the planet today will confirm this. Nearly five and a half million people have now been infected all over the world. Sadly, some 350,000 have lost their lives. This means so much more than simple statistics. The
630 numbers personify over 350,000 souls, real people, their pain and suffering, grieving families, lives stolen and overwhelmed health services all over the planet.

Thankfully, Gibraltar has been spared so far, but we have seen how both the UK and Spain have been hit by COVID-19. The UK reported its first confirmed case, in York, on 31st January. Spain did so too, in the Canary Islands, on the same day. I have to say that January now seems a
635 lifetime away, so much has happened since then. The virus has now claimed over 37,000 lives in the United Kingdom and over 29,000 in Spain next door.

We had, as has been said, our first confirmed case here on 3rd March, so when this House sat, 17 days later on 20th March, the danger we faced was a very real one. On 20th March, Gibraltar had carried out 146 tests. We had 10 confirmed cases, eight of whom were still active.
640 Twenty-six people went into self-isolation on that day and 300 symptomatic people self-isolated that very week. As the Chief Minister has said, the advice to the Government was blunt and

direct: thousands of people would be infected, hundreds here could lose their lives, 1,500 could require hospitalisation and the risk of death was up to 3.4%.

645 This was a particularly difficult time for all of us. It was hard. A long dark shadow descended over our daily existence and we looked in horror at what was happening elsewhere, in China and in Italy in particular. We produced the modelling. We drew on the experience of other countries, limited experience at that time, and importantly we prepared.

650 In those terrible moments the key to containing the pandemic was quick action. On 4th March advice was issued to avoid large social gatherings. On 5th March many public events were postponed or cancelled. On 10th March the Rooke drive-in test facility was given the go-ahead. On 11th March the elderly and the vulnerable were warned to stay at home. Further action followed. On 14th March the closure of restaurants was announced. On 13th March the bus service was suspended. Public counters were closed. On 16th March the over-70s were confined by law. School children stayed at home.

655 Twenty days of escalating action culminated on 24th March, when Gibraltar was shut down. The aim then was to keep people away from each other and in this way control the spread of the virus to ensure that the GHA would be able to cope. This time, the enemy at our gates did not face us with spears or arrows or cannonballs, we faced a new and invisible menace, but our objective and our tactics were tried and tested. We shut our doors, we bolted the gates, we raised the drawbridge and removed our people from the path of danger, we scourged the land in front of the virus; and behind those walls we armed ourselves to the teeth, our weapons not bombs and mortars, not fire ships and artillery but preparation and organisation. More ward beds were provided at St Bernard's, a COVID ward was set up specifically, a COVID ICU also – a 500% increase in ICU beds, more ventilators, huge amounts of PPE, a cohort of nurses from the United Kingdom. A new field hospital was set up within days and a call for volunteers was issued on 16th March. Over 1,100 people answered the call to arms. It is important to pay tribute to them all, because nobody quite knew what they were letting themselves in for at that time. We also need to pay tribute to our Health Service, to the Public Health team, to our emergency services, to our essential services, to the Civil Service and the public sector, to the private sector and to the people of Gibraltar as a whole. They were all our first line of defence and their actions determined what would happen next against the most serious health hazard of our lifetime.

675 The truth is that for just over a century the world has not seen a global pandemic quite like this one, not since the days of the so-called Spanish flu of 1918 which was arguably even worse than COVID-19 in terms of the estimated number infected, then 500 million people; the estimated number of deaths, 50 million; and the demographic that was most at risk, then those under five, those between 20 and 40 and the elderly. A key factor at the time was that the Spanish flu came in two waves, both here and worldwide. The first wave reached Gibraltar in May 1918. Six hundred cases were reported and 21 people passed away. The second came in December 1918. There were then 3,000 cases and 111 fatalities. The second wave, locally and globally, was more lethal than the first. Nobody knows how this existing pandemic will evolve. What we do know is that we won the first battle in the war and that in the event of a second battle against the virus Gibraltar is now better prepared than ever before.

685 All over the world, COVID-19 has gone on a merciless rampage against the elderly. It has decimated care homes. It has destroyed the lives of the frail and added to the suffering of the vulnerable. We have seen the tragedy play out on our television screens. I have no doubt that the early action taken in Gibraltar has saved lives. Many senior citizens here went into voluntary confinement. Measures were put in place at elderly residential services and strict controls at Government sheltered accommodation. This has worked, so far. The last figures I saw showed that only nine over-70s contracted COVID-19 in Gibraltar, and they put up a fight and they sent the virus packing. We would expect nothing less from that generation and I want to praise them.

690 Eighty years ago last week, on 22nd May, many of them set sail across the Straits to French Morocco. They did so in a process of wartime evacuation and re-evacuation that did not come to an end until 1951. They faced the horrors of war in London. They braved the U-boats as they

695 crossed the Atlantic westwards to Jamaica and southwards to Madeira. They shivered through bitter winters in bare metal huts in Northern Ireland. Decades later, they were the backbone of our resistance to General Franco. They endured the hardship of a closed border and the years of siege that followed, and they did so on a point of principle. That 'golden generation', as the Chief Minister has described them, set an example to us all. They made a sacrifice for the common good, over and over again.

700 This time, they were asked to make yet another sacrifice, and again they were not found wanting. The Government pays tribute to them, because our over-70s were advised to self-isolate before anyone else and the restrictions on them, first advisory and then mandatory, have lasted for longer than those on anyone else. All this time, they have been cut off from children, grandchildren, friends and family, some of them alone at home. I know that new technology has
705 helped. Virtual groups have connected together. Support mechanisms have been set up. Food deliveries, collection of prescriptions and medications – all this has helped too. That wartime structure was very ably strung together by my colleague the Minister for Civil Contingencies, Samantha Sacramento, and the Civil Contingencies Co-ordinator, Ivor Lopez. They have had every single detail at their fingertips and worked through every problem to find a solution.

710 I also want to highlight the work of my colleagues the Minister for Public Health, John Cortes, and the Minister for Health, Paul Balban. Every single member of this team has been closely involved, as the Chief Minister has said. Sir Joe Bossano, Albert Isola and Vijay Daryanani helped to shape the transition to a wartime economy and they will now lead us in the transition on the way back from that, together with Gilbert Licudi – who has successfully handled our schools at
715 the same time – and Steven Linares, who led the redeployment of the teams at the GSLA and Housing, including the protection of our pensioner flats: all led from the front by my hon. Friend the Chief Minister, who has not shirked from taking difficult decisions and doing what needed to be done. That is what leadership is all about and that is why we have a good story to tell today.

720 But getting there has not been painless. Some messages have been difficult. They have been hard to receive and equally hard to deliver. Tough decisions have needed to be taken and then communicated, both the good and the bad. We have acted on medical and Public Health advice. We have followed the experts. In today's world, none of this is easy because everyone considers themselves to be an expert on everything and everyone has an opinion about everything – true, and this is healthy, but this attitude often generates misinformation and this misinformation
725 often leads to confusion. This can be unhelpful at a time of a public health emergency and at a time of a global pandemic.

The Government continues to urge citizens to listen to official expert advice and to ignore everything else. Indeed, such information has flowed from day one in a manner that is unprecedented, both in the detail and in the volume. Our flagship has been the daily press
730 conference at 4 p.m. We have hosted some 60 of these and reached the homes of thousands of our people directly. The vast majority have acted on what they heard. We have disseminated statistics, given advice, explained the law and provided up-to-the-minute details about every aspect of the pandemic. Our small Press Office team have risen to the challenge too. They have outdone themselves and the Government is very grateful for that. Since 12th March, Gibtelecom
735 has sent the test data directly to thousands of mobile phones. The Government has placed Ministers and officials in front of the press and the public, and the Opposition have been involved, briefed and consulted. They too have had the opportunity to meet with our experts and to question them.

740 My hon. Friend the Chief Minister has said that we won the first round against COVID-19, and this is true. We have also said that the war is not over. Last week, the World Health Organization reported the biggest daily increase in infections yet: 106,000 cases in 24 hours. At the same time, the Director of the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control has warned Europe to brace for a second wave. The question, she said, is when and how big. Therefore, as we unlock Gibraltar it becomes all the more important to follow the rules so that we can arrive
745 to as near normality as possible, because none of us want the pandemic to pick up again.

Of course there is life after COVID-19, but this life may be a very different one to the one we knew before. In a sense, we now move into a new world, a world that contains numerous unknowns, possibly a world with less human contact, certainly a world where we will need to adapt to what they call a 'new normal'. And we all know what the new normal will bring: social distancing, contact tracing, aggressive testing, self-isolation, quarantine and face masks. EasyJet announced this week that passengers will be required to wear face masks from the moment they step into an air terminal, throughout the flight and until they exit at their destination terminal. We need to face such new challenges with common sense, with social responsibility, with discipline and with an understanding of our civic duty. We can only make this work if we all work together. That is a new reality we must come to terms with.

The House knows the importance of testing as we move forward. Iceland has been held up to the world as a model for COVID-19 testing. They have conducted more tests per million inhabitants than any other country and often topped the global rankings. Over this bank holiday weekend, for the first time, Gibraltar overtook Iceland and became first in the world: the global leader in testing. This says much about our determination and our resolve in this fight. It also says much about our organisation. In fact, the number of tests done so far, which is over 7,000 today, represents some 21% of our population.

Moving on, the pandemic has taught the planet a valuable lesson, in many ways and in many different areas. The weeks of lockdown have cleaned up the air; reduced the levels of noise – you could hear birds chirping through open windows. The canals of Venice have lost their murkiness. Wildlife has now appeared in new localities. Marine life has flourished. The environment has become the clear winner. But this has also been a time to reflect deeply, to consider how we can best consolidate those green gains, to pause and to ponder, away from the daily challenges and the pressures of life. It has been a time to better understand the things we value most, to reassess what we once took for granted, because the pandemic has opened our eyes. You now see families spending time together walking, cycling or jogging; parents joking with their children; children keeping in touch with their elderly relatives; neighbours taking care of each other, making sure that the elderly and the vulnerable are keeping safe. These were traits we had always enjoyed as a community, but we were losing them. Sadly, they have long disappeared from many other countries. So, we need to stop in the moment in order to take stock of where we are, in order to cherish those values and treasure them.

These past months have taught us many lessons as a people, much more than about complex medical questions, much more than about public health pandemics: our sense of community, our sense of fellowship, our sense of purpose, our sense of individual action for the common good and our sense of Gibraltar as our family, which is now stronger than ever. We have pulled together in the fight against COVID-19. That fight is not yet over, but we have already learnt profound lessons about who we are.

Thank you. (*Banging on desks*)

Hon. Chief Minister: Mr Speaker, can I thank all hon. Members who have contributed to the debate for their words today. In particular, can I start by thanking the Hon. the Deputy Chief Minister for his very kind words and once again for his remarkable and exceptional support to me throughout this period.

During the course of my initial address I omitted to highlight one aspect of the response that Gibraltar has seen, I think, and all of us have appreciated and have at different times praised, and that is the work that has been done in one particular division of the Gibraltar Health Authority, Elderly Residential Services, where we had a concern from the very beginning that if the virus were to get in, either with a relative visiting a resident or a member of the staff who might be a symptomatic, there would be a great difficulty for the whole community if the virus were to spread amongst the residents. The work that has been done there by everyone who works in ERS and has understood the need to be repeatedly tested, to wear PPE, led by Antonio

Marin and Susan Vallejo, has been absolutely remarkable and we do owe them a huge debt of gratitude.

800 I do not underestimate the sacrifice that has been made by the relatives of those who are resident in ERS facilities, who have not been able to visit their relatives. We are slowly trying to unlock that in some way. The generosity of those who have wanted to assist by donating technology that has been used for people to be able to see their relatives ... This is a part of the sacrifice that has been undertaken by this community and the work that has been undertaken by members of this community that I do want to specifically highlight, because this was a key area
805 of concern for all of us.

The prevalence of the infection in our community today, which will now be going out in the text messages that Gibtelecom will continue to send, is 11 cases of COVID, three of them local residents and eight of them cross-Frontier residents. I do want to make the point, as hon. Members who have contributed have talked about the pandemic not being over, that that is, of
810 course, exactly the situation that we are in. We have to be particularly careful as we go forward. We cannot allow complacency to set in.

I do want to just highlight that those that we are identifying as active cases are being identified, remarkably, in the frontline random public screening, not in the symptomatic testing. So, a lot of people who are turning up with COVID-like symptoms are being tested and they do
815 not have COVID. Some people are walking around and are being randomly tested, and that is where we are finding COVID. It is important that that be understood, that a lot of the people who have the symptoms are suffering potentially from another strain of coronavirus – which we now know is the technical term for a form of flu – or indeed from allergies, which are also prevalent in this period. They do not have COVID, and yet we are finding COVID in people who
820 have absolutely no symptoms. So, this has not gone away, and you have to be careful not just to shield yourself from somebody who is coughing or who is sneezing or who might appear ill; actually, the prevalence of the infection in our community now seems to be in those who have none of those symptoms. The reason that we are reporting where people are resident now is so that we understand – and this is a key factor as well – whether we are having community transmission or not. As we move to the stage of contact tracing – and again I do not want to pre-empt questions that are on the order paper and talk about the detail of contact tracing and apps, which we will talk about in the context of Question Time – it is important that we understand how the limits of contact tracing will operate once we have got people who are from beyond our shores and the contact that the Hon. the Minister for Public Health has established
825 with the public health authorities of Spain to co-operate with them so that they can do contact tracing also in Spain on that basis.

Mr Speaker, I obviously thank the Hon. the Leader of the Opposition for his words this morning about the co-operation with the Government and the fact that, whatever we may say, of course the judgement of history is not one that we can deliver today; it will be delivered by
835 history – that is to say by future generations. As he often quips that we cannot read history backwards, I often quip that it is going to judge us – at least on this side of the House – well, because it is going to be written by the Deputy Chief Minister. Now that there is another historian in our mix, there might be two versions of that history. I hope that, in respect of this part of the political history of Gibraltar, the history he might write and the history the Deputy
840 Chief Minister might write might be a little like a Venn diagram and they might, on this at least, be at one – although, for all I know, they could be at one on much more than just this part of our history.

The hon. Gentleman referred us to the numbers of those who had passed away. He knows that in one of our press conferences I did that also because I am just remarkably struck by the
845 size of the numbers, and this is one of the things that we must bear in mind. In Italy, the number of people who have died equates to the whole of the population of Gibraltar. In Spain, the number of people who have died equates to all of the adult population of Gibraltar. In the United Kingdom, the country with which we have the closest affinity, the numbers now exceed

850 the population of Gibraltar. And the United States has now gone into seven figures in terms of the deceased. Those are really quite remarkable.

This week, I was struck by a front cover of the *New York Times* that published the names of 1,000 Americans and actually printed not just their names and their ages but a line with what they were known for by their families, demonstrating that these are statistics to a very great extent in the context of calculating what is going on with the virus but each one of them is a life. 855 I was struck by the way that the Hon. the Leader of the Opposition referred to everybody being a father or a son, a sister or a daughter. I had made exactly that reference myself in a press conference. It is particularly important that we never forget that it is not just potentially a relative, it is potentially each of us; and that the best way that we can bring the right attitude going forward, as we move away from the initial period of what you might call the fear, is the 860 ability to understand that each of us has to protect our family unit and ourselves from the things that could expose us and each of our family units to the virus. If we all do that, then we are more likely to halt the spread of the virus at all. If we all follow the rules, we are all more likely to ensure that there is not a spread of the virus. I will come to some of the things that the hon. Lady said about following the rules in a moment, but I think this is a key and important point.

865 The hon. Gentleman referred to the issue of messaging, which I will come to when I address the issue of the beaches that he was dealing with, but I think the best message we can each send out is a message of personal responsibility to follow what we understand are the rules and to understand what the rules are, not simply to fall into the shorthand of what the rules are but to understand what the rules are. I will say a little more about that when I deal with some of the 870 extraordinary things that the hon. Lady has said.

Mr Speaker, in the way that the hon. Gentleman responded when I called him – and he referred to the fact that it was about 10 days after the index case – and showed him the science of what we were being told, I detected a man who had been Minister for Health and understood the limits of what the Health Authority can do and the ability that the Health Authority had to 875 surge and to do more than it usually does but also with a limit. He talked about the dark storm that we have had to grapple with, and my concern then, when I spoke to him – and it was a concern that the whole Cabinet had shared and reflected on greatly – was that there was the possibility for great civil distress in our community.

Again, reflecting on numbers, which the hon. Gentleman gave and I have reflected on in the 880 past, if you talk about a thousand people dying in the context of Gibraltar, you are touching every family. If you get to 3,000 people potentially dying over the period of the virus, a lot of them dying in a short period – whether that turned out to be right or it turned out to be wrong, whether the calculations eventually were better understood in the context of different modelling, but that is what you are faced with – that is more than just every family being 885 touched by the virus. That is worse than any war we have been through and that can lead not just to great grief but to great civil distress that could lead to – and I have said it before – a very dystopian probability. We have avoided all of that, and faced with those remarkable potential consequences I thought it was clear to both of our teams, and I think it was clear to both of us, that we had to work together.

890 The hon. Gentleman referred to the fact that we have been in almost daily contact for a period as we have not been perhaps for 30 years – very frequent – and that we have worked well together, with tetchy moments. Well, of course there are tetchy moments in every relationship – in the closest relationship there are tetchy moments – but I think what we did was the hard thing to do because, as the hon. Gentleman also reflected, we are seven months out 895 from a General Election. There are 10 Members of this House here and seven there. The easy thing is to say, ‘Well, look, if you don’t want an Emergency Budget, we’ll have one – 10 to seven; if you don’t want regulations, we’ll have them – 10 to seven; or sign under a Minister’s hand. The harder thing to do was to get through those tetchy moments. Sometimes it is incumbent on us lawyers to work around the stones that the accountants throw in our way, or vice versa, but 900 that was the hard thing to do and we have achieved it and it is right that we should have worked

harder to achieve that in this moment. It is right that both teams should take something from it, because there will be things in the future where the consequences are not as dramatic but where we might work a little harder to try and find consensus because it will be in the interest of the community as a whole.

905 He is absolutely right that it would have been to cross a difficult Rubicon to get to the stage of a Government of national unity. It would not have been something that either of us would have done lightly. It was right, however, given the speed at which we were moving in the context of the difficulties that we were potentially facing, that we should be prepared and lay all of the groundwork for those potential steps to have to be taken, if they had to, but it would
910 have been a very bad sign indeed. It would have been a sign that we were moving in the direction of those casualties materialising, civil distress potentially being around the corner, and we have managed to work together without having to cross that Rubicon.

It is the reason, Mr Speaker – I will just allow myself one moment of reflection – why we did not believe that it was right to accept the invitation to move to a Government of national unity
915 when that invitation was extended to us by the then Leader of the Opposition now sitting to his left, the Hon. Mr Feetham, at the time of Brexit. We understood that there was a potential for Gibraltar to do well despite Brexit, and it would have sent a very bad sign indeed if we had had a Government of national unity then.

But the need might be there again in the future, and if it is – not on COVID or anything else –
920 if I am here and that need materialises, I will still extend the hand in the relevant circumstances. If I am not here, if I am there, or anywhere else, and it is ever extended to me or I am asked by anyone whether it should be an invitation that should be accepted, in the right circumstances the answer, in my view, should always be yes. In that, I join him in his gentle admonition of the hon. Lady and any others who might think that co-operation is a weakness. I think co-operation
925 is an opportunity for communal success, for community support where necessary, and it is absolutely right to take that course where it is possible.

The leadership of Sir Joe Bossano has always been based – when he was the leader of the GSLP, the Leader of the Opposition in particular – on doing the right thing for Gibraltar. I do not mean to use this as an issue of difference between us and I do not mean to go anywhere near
930 scoring a point, but on the issue of debt, for example, if you look at Joe Bossano's position – whether he is in government or in opposition – in relation to debt and how debt should be accrued there was never a changing of mind simply because he changed position. On the issue of sovereignty, the key issue which concerns us all, I will always remember and was so impacted by Joe Bossano saying of Peter Caruana in relation to the issue of joint sovereignty – although
935 then there was no attendance at Cabinet, no offer of a Government of national unity or anything, perhaps not necessary because there the rival was not invisible and biological; there the rival was political, visible and in London, let alone in Madrid, but Joe Bossano's position was to say, 'Look, before they get to him,' – the then Chief Minister, Peter Caruana – 'they have to get through me.'

940 There is no need for us to pretend to disagree where we agree. There is very good reason for us to robustly challenge each other where we disagree, because if we disagree genuinely we disagree for good reason and we want to make the point to the other that it is better to pursue this course than the other, but it does not impoverish democracy to agree. Indeed, much of what we do goes by agreement, and too often in democracy we are just analysing the 0.1% on
945 which we disagree – and fair enough, because we want to get even that 0.1% right, but there is not an impoverishment of democracy there at all. That is the richness of the system that we run, where it is run by those who are able and prepared to work together when they have to and they have the courage and the strength of character to take steps forward together when we have to.

950 Mr Speaker, it is indeed quite remarkable to see the layout of this place today. I was consulted on how it should work. The Deputy Chief Minister worked with the Clerk on setting out these benches. It feels a bit tight. I do not know whether it is me and my pandemic weight

955 issues or whether it is just that it is a little tight, but I am very relaxed about how we are sitting. We are all frontbenchers, whether we are at the front or at the back here, and I have no concern about the old Churchillian adage that in this sort of layout the enemy is often behind one and not in front of one. But given that we are not going to indulge in any partisan exchanges today, I will leave it just at that. I think everyone gets my point.

960 On the consistency of messaging, however, I have to say to both of the hon. Members opposite who have spoken that we do have to be a little careful with something as apparently trivial as the beach. I say ‘apparently trivial’ because we were talking a moment ago about the potential for mass casualties in our community and now we are talking about going to the beach. But the beach is one of the areas on which we have given advice. Yes, Ministers have gone to the beach also strictly following advice to go for exercise – to go for 30 minutes. I would not want anybody to think otherwise. There is the possibility that the beaches may be closed if
965 people are not observing the rules of social distancing. If we then took the steps necessary to facilitate that the beaches should be open before the bathing season ... I remind hon. Members that when they were in government the beaches did not have lifeguards or services until the beginning of the bathing season. We brought that forward when we were in government; we have just for this year taken the posture they used to take – that is important. But we have to be
970 very careful not to send mixed messages. The hon. Gentleman, perhaps a little more gently than the hon. Lady, who I will come to in a minute, used the beaches as an area of mixed messaging. This is the key point. If you facilitate attendance at a place which you are saying you should not be going to for more than a period, then you start to send a mixed message. I just find it very difficult to understand how people should be saying to us if somebody is irresponsible enough to
975 bathe whilst the red flag is flying, the Government has a responsibility to have someone there to save them, despite the fact that the Government has responsibly already told them that they should not be bathing because of the potential danger to life. This is a key issue because it goes to personal responsibility, it goes to common sense and it goes to mixed messaging, and I think both hon. Members have not understood that there is that potential for the message to be
980 mixed. I have seen suggestions that the Government may somehow have suggested that the lifeguards are designed to entice people to go to the beach. Nothing could be further from the truth, but if you provide an infrastructure for attendance at the beach how do you at the same time say legitimately ‘Do not attend the beach, unless you have to, for more than 30 minutes’? I think that is the difficulty.

985 But I think it is also true to say that we are enjoying the luxury of this debate. Mayor Cuomo, President Trump, Prime Minister Johnson and President Sanchez would be delighted to be having a debate about whether or not people should go to the beach, whether there should be lifeguards and whether they were snapped in their speedos, and not the debates that they are having. I think that that has to be understood.

990 Our message does not change. I read recently that somebody thought that I was being irresponsible because we are sending the message to stay at home unless you are going to work etc. but I had cycled to the top of the Rock – except, of course, we have also said that people should exercise. I need exercise more than most and I was only able to get to the top of the Rock on a bicycle because it was electrically powered, otherwise they would have had to pick me up
995 somewhere along the way.

It is important to understand the detail of the rules before saying to people, ‘You must abide by the rules.’ We have been very clear. As long as you observe the rules of social distancing you can be at the beach. If the beaches get too crowded they will be closed. Please, therefore, to avoid the beach getting crowded, be there for less than 30 minutes – give everybody a chance to
1000 be in or out. We need to put things into their proper context and we need to understand the rules that are now in place.

The hon. Gentleman and I, and members of the Cabinet, have expressed concerns about civil liberties throughout this period. There has not been here a Government *wanting* to interfere with civil liberties. We have to remember that, at the moment, our civil liberties are still

1005 impacted. I say that because they are impacted by my Government and with my consent. It is
not something I want to see continuing because we are restricting access to places and we are
still restricting the key freedom of association, the right to gather with as many people as you
like wherever you like. We are still impacting that, and that can have serious consequences.
1010 Demonstrations have not proceeded today when people wanted to demonstrate. It is their right
to demonstrate and to manifest themselves against the Government or in favour of the
Government, and we need to understand that we are not completely yet out of the part of this
process which has seen restrictions on liberty. So, people who are wanting to go to beaches etc.
or people who want to comment about that need to understand that.

The hon. Gentleman said that he will look at new economic measures that we propose, to
1015 understand their proportionality and how they might assist business. We expect to be trying to
consult with him and Mr Clinton on the feedback from CELAC during the course of next week.
There is a further CELAC meeting at the end of this week as well.

He then moved on to address the issue of, as an example, the session in the Spanish
parliament yesterday. I was equally struck by how the parliamentary debate has been infected in
1020 some jurisdictions – the political debate in some places with presidential systems is not actually
in a particular house of debate – and how vitriol has got worse in some places during this period
rather than better, and how those who have passed away as a result of COVID are being used in
the political debate by one party against the other. I confess I am disgusted. I watch that from
the outside, whether I watch it in Spain or I watch it in other jurisdictions. It is not a comment on
1025 any particular parliament, but I am disgusted when I see it. I am conscious when I feel that angst,
in particular in this context, and how people might look at us and some of the debates we have
had in the past when we have allowed our personal inflections to get the better of us – we are
all human after all, but I think it is an antidote to those moments when we see others go through
the process that they are going through now. I see some parliaments which have ground
1030 themselves to a halt, in effect, in terms of the work that needs to be done, which very often
requires cross-party consensus to be built if it is going to be enduring, and that is very worrying
indeed. Indeed, I might say that there are moments when this House and those in it may even
have set an example for those beyond our shores, perhaps even to those who gave us our
Constitution, and that is a good thing and is a reason for this community to rejoice. Too often
1035 the political process is the source of reason for people to regret. I think at the moment people
might take a slightly different view, although that is not for us to say.

Of course it is not necessary to shout from the rooftops when we have disagreements, as the
hon. Gentleman says, and we have wanted to ensure that the process of working together has
1040 been successful. We have wanted to ensure that we have accepted views which hon. Members
have shared with us. We have not wanted to be difficult and pernickety; we have wanted to be
open and positive and I know that they have too in the way that they have approached this, and
I think that is what has delivered success. Perhaps that is why people should reflect that the
nomenclature of the ‘Loyal Opposition’ carries that reference to loyalty. It is loyalty to the
process, to the people who elect us. Whichever side we are sitting on, we were elected for a
1045 purpose, and that is what a Loyal Opposition does.

So, I salute that he has not taken the Partido Popular attitude, as he described it, of
callousness; and if he had, I think that the judgement of history would have been as negative on
him and them as it will likely be on them and those that have. So it is also, in my view, very
astute politics to have done what the hon. Gentleman did and to have behaved and worked with
1050 the Government, as they have.

Can I simply just therefore point them in the direction of what my own instinct is? I do not
often give political advice to my opponents but I will just gently point them in the direction of
what my own political instinct is, which is that people do want that courage and that bravery to
continue from all of us. They are, they say, going to be critics of us in terms of parking fees and
1055 road closures. It is one attitude Mr Speaker. We will then also point out that you can talk about
being committed to climate change as much as you like, but if when the time comes for action

1060 you are not ready to take the steps necessary to change behaviour, then it starts to grate with people; that if one day you complain that we are going too fast and the next you complain that we are not going slow enough, it starts to grate with people; and that there are some great things that we could do together on climate change, on roads and on parking, but that the populist route is the route of saying, 'If your parking is being put up by one penny, we're against it because we are with you,' etc. A gentle suggestion that there is a different road that we could take that would be in the best long-term interest of this community.

1065 The hon. Gentleman says he would continue to provide input on matters if we were ready to take that advice, and of course we will be open to listen to input genuinely given. We have done a lot of that work now out of the public domain and that is where we will do most genuine work. I think I have also demonstrated to the hon. Gentleman – as I have said before in this House but no one has ever tested me on it until now – that when an idea comes from the Opposition, and if the Government accepts it, we will not pretend it was a Government idea. We will be open and
1070 frank about the fact that it was an Opposition suggestion. I often have that dispute as to motions where our support is sought and I have always said if you let us into your thinking before you put the motion you can then put the motion yourselves and say it comes with Government support, but otherwise we will consider it to be just political posturing. I think it is important just to reflect, because we have had unnecessary dingdongs about that in the past, but I do hope the
1075 Government has now demonstrated to them that we are fulsome in demonstrating that something has come from the Opposition and is worth supporting when it does, and I hope that that infects the way that they do things in a positive way going forward.

1080 It was impossible, Mr Speaker, to believe that we might buck the trend internationally for casualties and it is remarkable that we have got this far without any, and we hope and pray and continue to work to ensure that we will be able to continue to buck the trend. It is also perhaps impossible to believe – and that is why I made the reference to the partisan nomenclature of the parties represented here – that the GSLP Liberals and the GSD could buck the trend of what has happened around the world, the political trend as well as the statistical trend. The rivalries have been long entrenched and yet we were able to do so, and that is definitely something worth
1085 remarking about repeatedly.

1090 There is now less contact between us. There may be more as we move towards the new financial measures etc., but it is only natural. He is a busy lawyer, sometimes difficult to get hold of – more difficult to get hold of than the Chief Minister on occasion – so I do not think there is anything strange or wrong in that, but he should know that as things become more robust and as we continue to move back to normality we will do everything we can to ensure that he continues in the role of Leader of the Opposition for many years to come, especially beyond the next General Election.

1095 Mr Speaker, the hon. Lady started by expressing gratitude and relief, which I think is an emotion that most people would want to express. I expressed the gratitude of the Government to our frontline workers in the whole of the public sector, indeed those in the private sector who also continued operations, and relief of course is what we all feel. But the hon. Lady was very particular. She said that she expressed her gratitude and relief to the Government and to frontline workers – therefore, two separate entities – and to our trained public health experts. I thought it was very good of her to start that way and to express her views in that way. I do not
1100 think she would have found support outside of here for any expression of emotion other than that, but it was the beginning of a very mixed message, in particular for somebody who told us that one of the key potential areas of difficulty is mixed messaging. I think she incurred mixed messaging herself, unless what she was trying to do was to say both things: the thing that she knows is right, which is that the frontline workers and the Government and the trained public
1105 health experts have done a remarkably good job, the results of which speak for themselves to now, and we certainly hope and pray that we will continue to see those results; whilst at the same time trying, as an apology for her role in the past 12 weeks, to find a way of justifying the positions that she is taking.

1110 Well, Mr Speaker, I empathise with her. To an extent, the result of her electoral failure has
come to roost in this period. There is an official Opposition. There is a Leader of the Opposition.
There are seven seats on that side: six were taken by the GSD; only one was taken by her. It is
impossible for the Government to be expected – and I will not talk about an amendment I have
seen on the order paper, but it is impossible for any government to be expected to engage with
1115 a whole opposition bench. Our constitutional system of Government and Parliament provides
not a constitutional role but recognition by the Speaker of a Leader of the Opposition for a
reason, and that is so that there is engagement between Government and the Leader of the
House and Chief Minister, and a representative of the majority of the opposition benches. That
is what has come to pass in the past 12 weeks.

1120 She had no difficulty with those issues when she was a Member of the official Opposition, but
now she has a difficulty with that, which I thought she expressed in terms a little too trenchant
to be realistic. For example, the hon. Member has had a number of briefings. She might have
wanted more, but she has had a number of private briefings. She has come to my office and met
with the Minister for Public health and the Director of Public Health and with Members of the
1125 Opposition as well. On the issue of Line Wall Road she has met on a number of occasions with
the Minister for Transport and his officials and I do hope that she will continue to take those
offers. But the United Kingdom’s strategy to release some of the restrictions there was shared
with the Leader of the Opposition in the United Kingdom half an hour before it was published.
Here, the Government and the Opposition were working together, and hon. Members had
embarrassingly early drafts, if I may put it that way – work which I would not usually have shared
1130 outside of the confines of my Cabinet colleagues, with notes and mistakes in which we were
working through, the usual early draft of any document. She had it three hours before it was
published. She is crying for a lack of consultation and a lack of involvement which is more than
the involvement that leaders of the opposition have in other parts of the world, even when they
are members of a Privy Council.

1135 She says therefore there is no democracy. Well, there is a lot of democracy. The hon. Lady
got a percentage of votes in the last General Election and hon. Members got a percentage of
votes and we got a percentage of votes; but we have not an electoral college system, we have a
parliamentary system, a first-past-the-post system which produces a result. Therefore, because
she has got one seat, she is consulted in that context. Otherwise, the hon. Lady ends up being
1140 like a failed presidential candidate who did not get enough electoral college votes but got more
popular votes in the whole of the United States, praying that the Founding Fathers had set up a
different constitution that might lead to a different electoral result. That is not the case. I did not
stand with her for election, I did not stand with them for election; I stood with my team, she
stood with her team, others stood in another team. This is the result of the General Election. In
1145 action. That is the reality.

She then went on to say something really quite remarkable which I cannot allow to pass
without comment, which is that she was urging us to make more and better use of PPE and that
she has been ahead of the curve at every juncture. If she has a printed speech, I think those
words will stand out to whoever it is that reads it. I just want to gently say to her that if she does
1150 feel that that is the case, it is not the feeling that people had at the last General Election,
otherwise they would have put her on this side of the House, not on that side of the House. It is
also not the feeling, I respectfully tell her, that I am left with in the context of my discussions
with her in relation to this matter, and it does not sit well with the message that she started to
deliver, which was to express gratitude and relief for the work – forget the Government – of our
1155 public health professionals who had done such a great job. So, either she thinks that they have
done such a great job or she thinks that she was ahead of them at every juncture and she should
send them a note verbale once a week of what she thinks they should be advising us to do.

I really do not think that this is a time for that sort of politics and I do not think it has helped
her stature to have taken that approach in the context of this debate, which I think is
1160 unfortunate. I do not think that she has spent the past 12 weeks pushing the Government to do

more and better, which is another thing that she said, which would of course mean that she was pushing all of us to do more and better when we were trying to work together, and I think it does deprecate the work that she does as a Member of this Parliament when she brings issues concerning her constituents etc. that need attention and which we try to assist her with. It does
1165 deprecate that work when she takes this sort of unfortunate and unnecessary attitude.

It might be helpful to just look back and to see whether in fact we are all now doing the things that she said we should have done and that that is what has produced the very positive results that we have seen reported in our community. I really do not think that anyone should make that claim. I certainly do not. I do not think I have done everything right at every turn and
1170 look back and think, 'This was exactly the right thing to do on 28th February and exactly the right thing to do on 10th March.' I, more humbly, look back at what we have done and thank goodness that we seem to have got it right. As the Minister for Public Health was saying, the whole world was seeing this virus develop. It is a new virus; we did not understand it. The attitudes to it at a scientific level were changing as scientific interpretation of what the virus did and who it did it to was changing. The other alternative is to take her at face value and say at
1175 least one of us knew what was happening, at least one of us understood the virus before the rest of us, at least one of us knew what it was that we had to do. I commend her to tender her services to the World Health Organization.

Mr Speaker, the Unlock the Rock document is not fatally flawed, far from it. It is a very good
1180 piece of work that I am very proud that this Government has produced. It is only the beginning of the work that we will do. There will be more parts, as I have indicated. Although we may not be working as closely together, I hope that Members of the Opposition will want to seek to contribute to it. More of it will be economic now and I will of course continue to ask that, if they want an input, they should be able to have it because this is a community document. To a very
1185 great extent it will be part of the historical record of this pandemic and it is important that we do not start to deprecate it. Simply because one part of the document might say 'this happens in this phase' and the phase starts on one date and then it happens on another date in that phase does not mean that the document is tragically flawed.

This is not a community that is failing to adhere to the rules that we are proposing, far from
1190 it. The success that I have spoken about is in great measure because the Gibraltarians and residents of Gibraltar – not all of them are Gibraltarians, we have to recognise – have understood what they need to do as we slowly unlock. Yes, of course some people have been desperate to get out. Yes, of course some people have wanted at different times to not stay at home despite that being the advice. I fully understand that, but people have in very great
1195 measure followed the advice.

And a lack of enforcement, she says there is. Well, Mr Speaker, I do not know what it is that she wants. Does she want lifeguards? And I am not suggesting that they are there to entice her to the beach, far from it; I do not know where she got that idea from. Does she want lifeguards, and people to stay at the beach as long as they like? Or does she want police officers with timers
1200 at the beach telling people that their 30 minutes are up? One moment she tells us that we need enforcement, and that is what Unlock the Rock says, and the next moment she tells us that we need lifeguards. I really do not understand, and no doubt perhaps later during the course of this session, in Question Time, she might in some of her contributions want to further clarify that.

Yes, there have been positions taken in the United Kingdom and remarks here about herd
1205 immunity, about whether this was a flu. Whether the first line of defence in the GHA and the National Health Service would benefit from those who have contracted the virus coming back, because they will have immunity, to a great extent is still being talked about in the United Kingdom, but public health advice has changed, scientific advice has changed and scientific understanding has changed with this virus. Does that mean that UK advice was debunked, as the
1210 hon. Lady said? Obviously that is her interpretation, and it is a matter for us ... I think we have worked well with Public Health England and with, in particular – I have not mentioned him, but I should – Dr Nick Cortes in the Hampshire Hospitals, a consultant to the Gibraltar Laboratory,

1215 working directly with Public Health England with the support of Public Health England as well
when it comes to swabs etc. We will talk about swabs and reagent in answer to some of the
questions later. I do not see advice as having been debunked. I do not see that sort of populist
description of what has happened as being relevant and I really do not think that it is what we
need to be doing.

1220 On the issue of masks and the advice, it is true that some countries have required masks to
be worn in some areas. Spain is requiring it in some respects. Germany is requiring it in some
respects. The World Health Organization has taken a position. We have taken the position that
the World Health Organization has taken. That means if you are inside and you cannot observe
the rules of social distancing – one to two metres away from another person – and you are going
to be there for more than 15 minutes, then you should be advised to wear a mask, and there are
some other circumstances where masks may be advised. She is not within one to two metres of
1225 anyone in this House for more than 15 minutes; I think there is more space between us. She
chooses to wear a mask. It is a matter entirely for her. Nobody prevents you. There is no rule
that says you shall not wear a mask if you do not wish to. There is just no *requirement* to wear a
mask, as long as you can observe those parameters. I may wish to see everyone wear a red scarf
because that might make everyone look more socialist. It does not mean that we should. It is a
1230 question of whether there is the public health advice there, and applying the precautionary
principle – whether that is the right thing to do. The advice that we have – this is not political
decision making, this is the advice that we have, which she might say months from now might be
debunked – is that masks should be worn in the circumstances in which we have said they
should be worn, not otherwise. She would find it very difficult to persuade me that we should do
1235 things which we are not advised to do by legislation; in other words, that the Government
should require in law – which is what to ‘make compulsory’ means – something which it does
not have public health advice is necessary on the basis that it is necessary for public health,
because the Government should not otherwise be legislating. Therefore, I think she needs to
understand that the trigger to legislate has to be that the public health advice is there.
1240 Otherwise, there is no legitimacy to the legislation.

Then she says we have done so well in the first wave. So, she starts with gratitude and relief,
she then criticises everything that we have done in that process, talks about debunked advice
and then tells us that we have done very well in the context of the first wave. Well, look, we
have done quite well in the context of the first wave – if we want to call it a wave; we think it
1245 was more of a cluster. We must not get complacent; there is a long road still to go. There are
great dangers in the way. The hon. Gentleman raised the issue of the autumn. I agree with him.
That is potentially a greatly dangerous period. The summer may be dangerous because of the
advice that the heat may not deal with the virus as it might with others, so there is great danger
in the way.

1250 I just say to the hon. Lady, as gently as I can, that her contribution has been very mixed in the
way that it has tried to straddle both relief, success, gratitude and support, with huge criticism: ‘I
was ahead at every juncture and the advice of the UK, and therefore the advice you were
following, was debunked, and you must make decisions, in respect of masks, which are different.
I do think there is an element of confusion there and our success so far, as she put it, is not as a
1255 result of having followed her advice so far; although if she wants to paint it that way I am sure
that there will be many who will want to agree and some whom she will persuade to agree if she
decides that she wants to use this difficult period in our political life as an anvil on which to
hammer her partisan advantage and opportunity.

1260 I do not think that anybody was mocking her – and this is not a nursery, it is a Parliament.
Never has it been more of a Parliament than it is today. I am so sorry that she decided to take
that attitude. The test of leadership comes once and I am not sure that she has really
demonstrated that she is ready for leadership in this community, and I am sincerely sorry indeed
that in the context of this debate and in the context of this statement that we have had to deal
with answering points like that which she ended up making.

**Procedural –
Order of business**

1265 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Mr Speaker, I have nothing else, but I am happy to give an indication to the House before I sit down of what I expect today will be, before anything else.

Given the time, I would have thought that after anything else that needs to be said this morning I would adjourn now for an hour or so and then come back to lay on the table, to take questions, to bring a resolution that I have discussed with the Leader of the Opposition – and we
1270 may have a small amendment – and then take a Bill which I have certified as urgent, which is the Insolvency Bill.

In deference to the hon. Lady, because I understand tomorrow is a Jewish feast day, I will be hoping not to bring the House back tomorrow and to finish all of that business today. I would ask hon. Gentlemen and the hon. Lady, therefore, just to bear in mind that supplementaries in this
1275 Parliament have always been up to them and up to the Speaker, but if we can get through the questions quickly today then that will help us to deal with all of the business today and ensure that we do not have to come back tomorrow on a Jewish feast day.

I am grateful Mr Speaker.

**COVID-19 emergency –
Statement by Mr Speaker**

Mr Speaker: With the indulgence of the House, I would like to say a few words on the first
1280 day this Parliament resumes its normal activities after the enforced break brought about by the COVID-19 health emergency.

I am addressing the House as the Speaker and also as an over-70-year-old member of this community who has been in lockdown for 10 weeks. I am so grateful to everyone who has played a part in fighting this terrible threat to our lives. I am so glad to be alive and back here to
1285 preside over this meeting of Parliament. There have, however, been many moments when I was very afraid and thought I might contract the virus and die before my time. I am sure that many in our community will have had similar thoughts. Thankfully, so far, we have done well and have all pulled through and are now ready to resume our lives, albeit in a rather different world. However, we are not out of the woods yet and cannot lower our guard.

Throughout our recent history Gibraltar has been blessed with the confidence and determination to resolve many complex issues which have afflicted our small nation. Indeed, we have been very fortunate to have had a series of very gifted and astute political leaders who have seen us through many dark times. Our present leaders are no exception. I would like to thank the Chief Minister for his outstanding leadership and his heartfelt commitment to saving
1290 lives. I also wish to thank all the Government Ministers for their vital roles during these unprecedented times. It has also been very gratifying and reassuring to see the Leader of the Opposition working with and supporting the Government during this very difficult period. I thank the hon. Member for this. May I also thank all members of the Opposition for their important contribution. I also thank the hon. Lady.

The community as a whole has welcomed this display of unity in the face of such adversity. I believe we would not have achieved this surprising degree of success in combating the virus had it not been for the fact that in Gibraltar's time of need the whole community has stepped up to the plate. The observance of the tough lockdown measures has greatly contributed to this success. Our community's sense of responsibility and duty has once again come to the fore.
1300

From the outset of this emergency, the GHA worked round the clock to ensure that we were as prepared as possible to deal with the very real prospect of an onslaught from the deadly virus. This took me back to June of last year when I became critically ill with viral meningitis and
1305

1310 spent some time in the ICU. I was told I was intubated, on a ventilator, and that everyone, including my family, was required to wear PPE. This has brought home the fact that our doctors and nurses face the threat to their health and well-being not only at a time of a national health emergency but on a daily basis.

1315 I wish to thank the Director of Public Health and the acting Medical Director for their invaluable service in preventing a considerable potential loss of life. To Public Health Gibraltar and to the frontline and ancillary staff of the GHA, ERS and other care entities who have been at the coalface day and night and at great personal risk I say this: without your expertise, dedication and sacrifice, things could have turned out very differently. Gibraltar owes you a huge debt of gratitude.

1320 I would like to publicly recognise the valuable work undertaken by the RGP, GDP, Customs, Borders and Coastguards and teachers, as well as all those other persons whose professions and jobs have also put them in harm's way. I would like to thank the civil and public services for the crucial role they have played in this emergency. I also extend my thanks to CBF and the Royal Gibraltar Regiment and to the many volunteers. Last but not least, I wish to convey my thanks to the Civil Contingency Unit for co-ordinating the necessary action to deal with this major emergency.

1325 The number of deaths worldwide and the possibility that this virus may continue to rear its deadly head has brought into sharp focus the frailty of life in the world we now live in. We are so privileged to live in Gibraltar and to have such an excellent Health Service. The same cannot be said of many other countries. Let us not forget what we have and not take anything for granted.

1330 As the lockdown measures begin to ease, we should continue to act responsibly and observe the basic hygiene requirements and the need for social distancing. The virus is lurking out there, ready to pounce whenever we lower our guard.

Thank you. (*Banging on desks*)

1335 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Thank you very much, Mr Speaker, on behalf of all Members, for your very touching, kind, very heartfelt words. I think that you have spoken for all of us in the way that you have addressed us today.

1340 I am so glad that you are here and well. I really do not know in whose hands I would now put myself – I know there is one who would not get the chance anymore, and maybe even opposite it would be hard to choose! Later today, we will have an opportunity to hear from another one of the over-70s cohort who will be in more obviously robust mode than any of us younger saplings and against whom I dare say the virus never stood a chance!

I move that the House should now adjourn to quarter to three in the afternoon to continue with the timetable.

1345 **Mr Speaker:** The House will now adjourn to quarter to three this afternoon.

The House adjourned at 1.40 p.m.