



PROCEEDINGS OF THE GIBRALTAR PARLIAMENT

MORNING SESSION: 9.15 a.m. – 1.21 p.m.

Gibraltar, Tuesday, 10th July 2012

The Gibraltar Parliament

The Parliament met at 9.15 a.m.

[MR SPEAKER: Hon. H K Budhrani QC *in the Chair*]

[CLERK TO THE PARLIAMENT: M L Farrell Esq RD *in attendance*]

Order of the Day

Appropriation Act 2012 Debate continued

Clerk: Sitting of Parliament, Tuesday, 10th July 2012. Budget speeches continue.

Mr Speaker: The Hon. Isobel Ellul-Hammond

5 **Hon. Mrs I M Ellul-Hammond:** Mr Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to make my maiden address to Parliament just seven months after entering the political arena as Opposition Spokesman for Health, Education and Civil Contingencies.

10 This is the first Budget of our Parliament since the General Elections. It is both a duty and an honour for us on the Opposition benches to contribute to, and vote, on this vital discharge of the responsibility of Parliament.

Mr Speaker, I begin my address with Civil Contingencies and the Fire Service.

15 Despite the Government stating that within two weeks of being in office a smoke extractor system for the Fire Station would be ordered, six and a half months have passed with no sign of this electoral promise being fulfilled. This leaves our fire fighters at risk, something the Members opposite were quick to accuse the then GSD Government of, for not having installed this equipment.

I am assured that the smoke extractor system has already been ordered – we trust it will arrive soon. However, I hope the Government has learned from this experience: it is seldom the case that such optimistic deadlines can be achieved; that in future, their policies and promises should at least be tinged with a veneer of reality.

20 The Government has promised to relocate the Fire Station, something the GSD were already committed to. They claimed last October that the present Station was ‘no longer fit for purpose’. This apparently is no longer a priority; there is no commitment for it in this year’s Budget – a serious omission, considering the fundamental importance of such a facility to our community, a facility they condemned less than a year ago.

25 Let us hope, that under this Government’s term of office, this is addressed and when the new Fire Station is constructed, a 21st century approach is taken, with representation from our new Minister for Equality, so that any expansion in personnel will consider female fire fighters. (A Member: Hear, hear.)

30 The Opposition applauds the investment in and restructuring of the Civil Contingencies administration. It welcomes the creation of a new post of Civil Contingencies and Departmental Press Officer, which will also enhance the Government’s Press Office.

35 When we heard from the Hon. the Chief Minister, during May’s Parliament meeting, that six individuals applied for this newly created job, some of whom were local, it came as a surprise that the job went to an English retired Lieutenant Colonel and former MoD press officer. This Government, while in Opposition, vociferously criticised the GSD Government’s policy of employing the best person for the job, if that person happened to be non-local or retired. They stated, time and again, that the Government should be employing locals and giving jobs to young people looking for work in Gibraltar.

The Government’s manifesto in this regard is unequivocal and I quote:

40 ‘Residents First! ... It will be our policy in Government to give priority of employment in the public sector to local workers.’

Well, is this Government not now doing exactly what they accused the GSD Government of doing? Perhaps, at last, the Government has learnt something from the GSD. Employing the best person for the job is the right policy, irrespective of nationality or stage in their employment career, Mr Speaker.

45 However, there seems to be a contradiction in Government policy where on the one hand – a point on which my hon. Friend, Mr Netto, will elaborate later – the Hon. Minister for Employment is embarked upon the wholesale culling of foreign labour, in particular Spanish workers, from the public and private sector; but on the other, when they have the opportunity to fill a particularly meaningful post with a local, they employ an ex-pat on a fat pension.

I will now move to Education, Mr Speaker.

50 The schools within our education system are presently undergoing a Health and Safety Audit, which started on 24th January. This is expected to be an annual event; the cycle starts again in January 2013. That leaves less than one academic term free from audit a year, in which recommendations from the last audit are to be implemented.

55 Only two issues have been highlighted so far, from the auditing of five schools. I understand a further school has been audited, as announced by the Hon. Minister for Education in his Budget address. The findings so far from the audit are: a locked fire door, which could have been opened at any time, after one of the required fire drills; and the need to conduct an asbestos survey, which should already form part of the Health and Safety Department’s remit on reviewing all public buildings for asbestos and its condition.

The Government’s manifesto commitment reads, and I quote:

60 ‘In many schools there are health and safety issues that can affect both teachers and pupils. Based on a Health & Safety Policy, to be established by the Department, we will carry out an annual Health and Safety Audit of each school’.

65 The idea of an audit sounds very efficient. However, the reality is that all schools already have their own Health and Safety Policy in place; some have their own asbestos register. All schools abide by this policy document, which was created in 2010 in consultation with the Gibraltar Teachers’ Association. Any defects, shortcomings or Health and Safety issues that arise in a school are immediately reported by the Head Teacher to the Department of Education, which acts upon it.

70 Just another example of how this Government, in their manifesto, have made grand statements that sound impressive, to be seen to be all things to all men and to keep everyone happy, only to realise that in fact, these ideas have little impact in reality and Gibraltar’s schools were not in such a bad shape after all: they do not require formal, over-and-above Health and Safety auditing. Systems already in place worked, a point proven by the lack of audit findings.

75 However, a root-and-branch review of the whole Education System, which is a different matter entirely, would have been welcome and we would have done so had we been in Government.

The complement of school teachers has increased by 47. These teaching posts will be spread among schools to fill a curriculum gap, make a supply post permanent or to reduce class sizes. But this has happened in spite of the need to redefine catchment areas and relocate schools, such as Sacred Heart Middle School, which is part of the Government’s manifesto.

80 In order to accommodate these teachers and reduce class sizes, specialist teaching rooms will no doubt need to be converted into classrooms. Schools will continue to struggle in overcrowded conditions, with some buildings in desperate need of an overhaul or refurbishment.

Apart from a new extension to Notre Dame School and St Martin's School, which are welcome, the Budget does not allow for any new schools or extensions to other existing schools. Will extra classrooms be at the expense of specialist teaching rooms? Well, this may yet be an ill considered and ill-timed policy.

We too would have increased the teaching complement – if necessary by over 47 teachers – but only after a wide process of consultation between Government, teachers and parents. We would have explored the optimum locations for relocations of schools, the College, the Training Centre and a possible sixth form college, among sites at Rooke, the old St Bernard's Hospital and St Christopher's School. In other words, we would have taken a broad and responsible approach.

And before we get too excited about the headline, and I quote:

95 'Engagement of significant and unprecedented numbers of staff for schools... showing how seriously the Government has taken its promise to make education a priority',

let me remind the hon. Members opposite that when the GSD first got into Government in 1996, we too were serious about our priority commitment to Education. We significantly increased numbers of staff by: 45 teachers, from 288 to 333; 40 Classroom Aides, from 11 to 51; and 45 Special Educational Needs teachers, from three to 48. And this is with little increase in Gibraltar's school population over the years. It is the demographics and shift in population, rather than numbers, that have changed.

Yet another headline grabber to imply the GSLP saves the day and to slight the positive impact the previous Administration had with its Education policies. Well, this Government has a very tough act to follow.

Examining the distribution of children, and the demographic movement of population to new housing areas, has to be the priority. The hon. Members opposite have highlighted this in many of their Budget addresses when in Opposition. The Westside area has seen over 500 families move there. Bishop Fitzgerald School is struggling with such over subscription. The South District has grown by an extra 800 families, as part of St Joseph Middle School's catchment area. No provision has been made in the Budget to cater for this, despite, in answer to Question 28 in January's Parliament, the Hon. Minister's recognition of population shift and commitment to respond to this.

What Gibraltar needs is extra or larger school buildings, something the GSD was going to provide this term of office as part of its manifesto. The Government makes no provision for this yet. They will exacerbate the problem further.

Another GSLP manifesto commitment is to review the resources for Special Educational Needs of all schools, in order to identify what additional resources and support is needed. To this end, the Behavioural Education Support Team will be increased by three and Classroom Aides by 28, which is welcome. But there is a sense, from the Government, that not until they came into office did Departments work together for the benefit of the individual; a sense there was no collaboration between the Department of Education, the Health Authority and the Care Agency over an individual's care pathway. This is untrue and I hope the Government now recognises this.

The Department of Education has always taken the lead from the teachers who are qualified to assess, identify and refer children to the educational psychologist or care worker. Every school has its own Special Educational Needs co-ordinator, some with a special unit, dedicated to preparing children's individual education action plans. All these pupils are overseen by an Educational Adviser at the Department of Education, or if necessary, the Behavioural Education Specialist Team and Social Services Team.

In what way does the Government then feel that children with special educational needs in Gibraltar have not been adequately catered for? You see, another grand statement, Mr Speaker, from the GSLP manifesto, and I quote:

135 'A GSLP Government will require schools to identify the support that is necessary for children with special needs. An assessment will be carried out on all children after entry into the educational system to establish what extra support or tuition, if any, a child would require.'

Laudable as the sentiment is, the Government is now in the happy position of merely having to build on what the GSD has established over the years.

It is recognised that extra support will always be required by some children, and I am happy to see that Government will continue with this vital work. However, what they cannot do is cast doubt on an already successful system, just for the sake of trying to rubbish all the GSD Government has achieved and improved upon over the years.

May I take this opportunity, Mr Speaker, to join the Hon. Minister in congratulating the 'Impulse' team, from Bayside School, in winning best product for their 'Y-Tangle' as part of the Young Enterprise Scheme in the UK finals.

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Mr Speaker, I now move on to the Health Services in Gibraltar.

'Problems being experienced by many hundreds of users',

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say the GSLP in their manifesto,

'continued throughout the last four years and are not being properly addressed or rectified',

it continues. The manifesto also claims the GSD responded by saying these were inventions, and were solved by bringing in outsiders instead of listening to our own experienced professionals.

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Well, at May's meeting of Parliament, the Hon. Minister for Health told us that he is now turning to UK experts, outsiders, to advise on how our GHA services are to be run. He has visited the UK on three occasions for this. Ironically, at a time when the NHS itself is being characterised as a seriously dysfunctional public service and massive reforms are being propounded by its professionals. And yet, Dr. Cortes stubbornly refuses to listen to his own experienced professionals at home.

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During Parliament, and reiterated through a press release, the Hon. Minister told us he was seeking advice from UK consultants on administrative issues, management, open board meetings, community-based medicine, stroke care, appointment systems, clinical processes, hospital medical staffing, performance management, training and specialist care. We assume then he thinks none of his own local, experienced health professionals in Gibraltar are capable of providing him with sound advice on such medical matters.

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The Hon. Minister is barely even consulting the GHA Board for advice, which he has met with only twice in seven months. I must point out that the Board used to meet every month when the GSD were in Government. This is a statutory body and its members should be participating and having their local 'expert' say on the introduction of new Government policies for the GHA and the implementation of new services. This is a crucial part of good board governance, instead of the rubber-stamping of top-down policies by paying lip-service to the legislation.

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The GHA Board exists to be accountable for, and to ensure, the GHA organisation works and offers 'value for money'. The GHA Board is where all authority lies. It is not about ratifying volumes of information that purports to monitor organisational performance, which may mask the fact that proper monitoring is still not occurring.

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As part of the Government's openness policy, GHA Board meetings are now to be held in public. Part of this is publishing the Board Reports on the GHA website, and I acknowledge this is welcome. These Board papers give the public a chance to see how much the GHA Executive does in order to keep the GHA working and running. But that is the only place where the openness and transparency exists. This is yet another example of a grand statement which has resulted in nothing of substance and if anything, might stifle the ability of the Board to continue doing its work.

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Why, Mr Speaker? Well, the 'in public' aspect and the change in presentation of GHA Board meetings is, in my view, ineffective board governance. The Chief Executive now speaks on behalf of the Executive. The non-Executive members' ability, under scrutiny from an on-looking public, to ask those all too difficult questions and scrutinise policy-making, is curbed. The GHA Board becomes less efficient, it becomes a public spectacle. The members are mere performers going through the motions to satisfy a manifesto commitment, which offers no enhancement and where very little accountability really exists. As an ex-GHA Board member myself, I note that the GHA Board process remains exactly the same – a process I disagreed with then and one which I was hoping to change, had I been given the opportunity.

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If there was one lesson that came out of the 2008 global recession, as a result of the collapse of the banks, it was that board governance of many banks and financial institutions was unsuccessful in setting targets and holding chief executives to account. It was found that many boards tended to be incompetent groups of competent individuals. Their expectations, if stated at all, tended to be unclear and incomplete, and the executive reports reported against few or no criteria.

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This was something I felt the GHA Board was also guilty of. In the absence of clear instructions or clear assignment of the Chief Executive, we found evaluating performance was an exercise in futility. The emphasis should not be on meetings in public; it should be on empowerment of the Board. Transparency is understanding how and why spending decisions are made. It is not just the production of data, presentations from the public which will be considered and the issuing of a multitude of press releases. This is why a GSD Government would have further empowered the GHA Board, financial managers, consultants and doctors: to exercise greater control over spending choices, budgets and service

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prioritisation to ensure the proper balance between medical services, value for money and budgetary discipline.

205 Turning to clinicians, Mr Speaker, the Hon. Minister for Health stated in March's meeting of Parliament that he was weeks away from resolving the issue of the consultants' contract. We now know, from six separate consultants, that the contract has not been discussed with the Consultants' Body in their three formal meetings with the Hon. Minister, apart from 10 minutes at the end of their last meeting with him. They claim it is not true, as the Hon. Minister stated in March, that and I quote:

210 'The consultants have been kept aware of the situation through regular meetings'.

215 Additionally, the consultants have heard through the GHA grapevine that a draft consultants' contract will be removing the 25% gratuity aspect of contracts on termination. It will be replaced by a pension package, which amounts to a reduction of 15% to 20% salary.

220 This pension package is the Provident Fund No. 2, which all hospital doctors are being asked to join as from the end of July, no negotiations or questions asked. This affects 43 of the 46 medical grades of the hospital. How are these 43 GHA hospital doctors and surgeons to now recover the loss of pension for the years some of them have already worked? This cannot be right and the question must be asked, how is this fair?

225 How does the Government intend to attract and incentivise good surgeons and physicians to come to Gibraltar and stay to work, if it changes employment contracts unilaterally, or cannot offer competitive rates and good packages which are favourable and fair? I assumed it would be Government policy to attract the best doctors possible for the GHA and not just the cheapest and less experienced.

230 The very first thing, Mr Speaker, the Hon. Minister for Health did, when he came into office, was to blame the previous Administration for a lack of planning, which he believes led to a compounding of bed shortages and he said, 'the GSD have a lot to answer for' – conveniently forgetting that it was the GSD Government which opened the Care Agency's John Cochrane Ward, with 31 beds; the GSD that introduced the Day Surgery Unit, which caters for about 80 to 100 patients a month, who will not take up a hospital bed; the GSD that more than doubled Mount Alvernia beds from 62 to 135; (A Member: Hear, hear.) the GSD that introduced domiciliary care, increasing its funding year on year and during the last term of office by 118%, from £350,000 to £760,000; not to mention the bespoke 230 elderly-friendly flats at Bishop Canilla House and Albert Risso House. I am proud to stand here and answer for this record, Mr Speaker.

235 A 'complete absence of forward planning,' was how the Hon. Minister Cortes described the previous administration's commitments. We presume he was not referring to the commencement of the new Mental Health and Alzheimer and Dementia hospitals; plans for a Debilitating Unit and Elderly Day Care Centre; with much progress on a new residential care facility at the old St Bernard's Hospital.

240 It remains to be seen, Mr Speaker, what difference, if any, the current Government's long-term plans are for the elderly and sick. At the moment, it seems their only commitments are to finish the GSD plans, I have just described.

245 The Government now claims to have solved the bed blockage situation at St Bernard's Hospital. The Hon. Minister Costa must be pleased, seeing that this was his perennial gripe when in Opposition. This has been solved it seems by opening the Calpe Ward of 18 beds, with much fanfare, and by increasing domiciliary care funding, as the GSD did every year. There are today about 118 elderly people in urgent need of residential care, 71 of whom are in St Bernard's Hospital, all of whose places are waiting to be filled by more elderly people. And let's not forget the 450 who have expressed an interest in a future need for admission to residential care.

250 It is only a matter of time, however many Care Agency beds you add to the hospital and elsewhere, they will soon fill up again because the demand is ever-increasing, as people live longer. This is where the GSD Government has an excellent record in substantially increasing the capacity and resources from the meagre facilities made available in 1996 from an outgoing GSLP Government.

255 The Hon. Minister says an increase in Care Agency beds is reflected in the decrease of number of surgeries cancelled due to bed blockage; that since the Calpe Ward opened in February, only one surgery was cancelled in March, as opposed to 12 in February. This is purely circumstantial evidence that the problem has been addressed.

260 If I can refer the Hon. Minister to surgery cancellations in 2011, due to unavailability of beds, in two months, zero operations were cancelled; in one month, one operation was cancelled; in another month, two were cancelled; in July, three were cancelled; and in December 2011, only four operations were cancelled. It is a matter of how we select our figures, Mr Speaker.

The evidence suggests the extra 18 beds have made no difference, but again, it makes a great press release. It shows once more how the new Government is only concerned with spin and not substance. (A Member: Yes!)

265 What the Hon. Minister for Health fails to tell us is what his Chief Executive Officer outlines in his report to the GHA Board on the 30th of May and I quote:

‘We have an additional 15% occupancy in the wards at St Bernard’s Hospital’,

270 which is in line with their manifesto commitment of

‘Our short term policy will be to add beds at St Bernard’s.’

275 This is backed by the Nursing Director’s report to the same GHA Board meeting which says and I quote:

‘February 2012 has seen a continuation in the trend of high occupancy for all adult wards, with extra beds utilised intermittently during this period.’

280 and this is after the transfer of patients to the Calpe Ward.

An additional 15% bed occupancy; St Bernard’s Hospital, with its four main adult wards, has the capacity of 120 acute beds. With the 15% of extra beds, this amounts to 18 extra beds spread among the four adult wards. This leaves no spare capacity, Mr Speaker, available to meet the peaks in demand: 18 beds in the Calpe Ward is another headline, another PR grand statement this Government makes so well, without really addressing the issue.

285 Again, there is a sense from the Government that not until they came into office did Departments work together for the benefit of the individual, and that there was no previous collaboration between the Health Authority and the Care Agency over an individual’s care pathway. They seem to be suggesting that the set-up of John Cochrane Ward, domiciliary care, occupational therapy, physiotherapy, housing needs and community nursing care all magically happened in isolation of each other, when previous Ministers Del Agua and Netto co-ordinated health and care matters – again, casting doubt on a successful system for the sake of trying to rubbish all the GSD achieved and improved upon. (A Member: Shame!)

290 Here I will add how the previous Minister for Health, Mrs Del Agua, according to GHA staff, believe her to be the only Minister for Health who routinely met with staff during her unaccompanied rounds of the hospital. (Laughter) She used her experience in Social Services to ensure – (Laughter and interjections)

Mr Speaker: Order! Order! Order! (Interjections)

300 **Hon. Mrs I M Ellul-Hammond:** She used her experience in Social Services to ensure the smooth co-ordination between the two Ministries, Mr Speaker.

We welcome that the two Agencies continue to work together, as they did under the GSD, (Hon. Miss S J Sacramento: Absolutely.) and that they feel the need to formalise this with the setting up of a named inter-Ministerial Committee on the Elderly. However, this co-operation has always existed, evidenced in the yearly ‘Bed Management Reports’ by the Clinical Nurse Manager – and neither was it given the PR spin this Government is so adept at, in order to make out it is doing so much more than it is actually doing.

305 This, I can further demonstrate by the Government’s issue of a press release on the GHA’s Health Promotion Unit setting up, and I quote:

310 ‘a Facebook page to assist in raising awareness... in keeping with a Government manifesto commitment to promote healthy living.’

315 A Facebook page – seriously? But of course we are all aware of Dr. Cortes’ unilateral propensity to use Facebook in policy-making, given his grand statement on the 1999 Fishing Agreement! Well, this is no replacement for people, Mr Speaker. The Government should first invest in more Health Promotion Officers, of which there is no indication in this Budget. Promoting healthy living means Public Health staff raising awareness on preventative measures through talks, the media and awareness stands in town; by engaging with the public in a meaningful way.

320 However, I look forward to, and welcome, the initiative announced by the Hon. Minister yesterday in taking the lead on healthy living through his declared lifestyle changes. We acknowledge the Government is only seven months into its term and has just started to implement its manifesto commitments. Some we applaud, such as the purchasing of five Public Transfer Vehicles, following on from the three ambulances ordered by the GSD as part of their continuous investment in the GHA, which have just arrived; the placing of 10 Public Access Defibrillators around town; the introduction of ‘No Smoking’ legislation, which is a personal favourite of mine; and the employment of more GHA staff, announced in the Budget,

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which we are pleased to see follows the GSD policy where we increased the GHA staff by around 500 over 15 years.

330 However, in the Government's eagerness to show it is in touch, that it will save Gibraltar, it makes – here it is again – grand statements in its manifesto that sound impressive; only to realise that when in Government, the reality is not so.

I can demonstrate this with the following manifesto commitment and I quote:

335 'We will be looking into operating a day case unit for surgical services; allowing people to be treated more quickly and efficiently and will eradicate the cancellation of operations as a result of bed shortages.'

Well, this service already existed in St Bernard's Hospital when they were writing the manifesto. It was set up in February 2005 and treats about 80 to 100 patients a month; how out of touch is that? Six years out, Mr Speaker!

340 **Hon. D A Feetham:** They're not laughing now!

Hon. Mrs I M Ellul-Hammond: At least, it is an acknowledgement that we did do something to tackle the cancelled operations due to bed blockages in the hospital.

345 Another Hon. Minister Costa 'perennial issue' levelled against the GSD was the management of Norovirus outbreaks at St Bernard's Hospital. Well, two weeks after the Norovirus outbreak at St Bernard's, it took questions from the Opposition and GBC for the Government to make any information public on the outbreak. By then it had affected several patients and their families, and some wards were closed. It was irresponsible for the Government not to make a public health statement from the outset, to ensure the public were informed and to mitigate the risk of spread among the community. As a
350 consequence, 55 patients and 24 GHA staff members were affected.

And what was the Government's response to the concerns we raised? Well, let me tell you, and I quote:

355 'If the Opposition is not satisfied with the way the recent Norovirus outbreak in hospital was handled, it should look to itself for blame. The Government is barely two months in and still working with the system it has inherited and therefore the procedures and practices in the hospital are those which the GSD put in place.'

This is ludicrous, and here is where I converge from the Hon. Minister Costa.

360 The Hon. Minister for Health criticises the processes implemented by the GHA, which are standard, public health, clinical governance, procedures and not Government policies.

They sit outside and above politics. The Hon. Minister demonstrated that he did not understand basic clinical systems. Any excuse to again point the finger at the GSD for the failings of the Government, irrespective of whether they are self-inflicted or not.

365 I would like to reiterate a note of caution, which I have publicly expressed. We have received many concerns from members of the public about the new one month advance appointment system, to be introduced at the Primary Care Centre in August – the major concern being, this will not stem the demand for appointments requested in a given month. It might actually make obtaining an appointment more difficult because of this limitation. We believe the new monthly available slots will fill up very quickly, resulting in an increase again in people queuing up early in the morning outside the Primary Care Centre
370 for those few daily empty appointment slots.

We hope, however, this policy succeeds as a measure to reduce the number of appointments missed by patients not attending the Primary Care Centre. It will then add to the already implemented measures by the previous Minister for Health, Mrs Del Agua, of saving daily empty appointment slots; an appointment reminder system; an electronic web-based and voicemail cancellation system; the
375 publication of the number of 'Did Not Attends'; and the extension of Primary Care Centre opening hours from 8.00 a.m. to 6.00 p.m..

No address on health by me, Mr Speaker, would be complete without saying something on breast cancer care services in Gibraltar. The Breast Screening Programme has now been in place for a year and a half, a time in which nearly all women eligible in Gibraltar would have been invited for a mammogram
380 for their first time. Last year 62.8% of women invited took up the offer of a mammogram; in the first five months of this year the uptake has only been 53.1%. To give you an idea, the average uptake in the UK is 72% – still not considered high enough.

385 It saddens me personally, after all the hard work 'Breast Cancer Support Gibraltar' did in order to achieve the setting-up of such a vital and life-saving screening programme, that so few women are taking advantage of this service. This is a service that should be taken up by almost 100% of our women.

I urge the Government today, as part of their Public Health Policy, that they conduct an awareness campaign on the benefits of the Breast Screening Programme and encourage women to take up the offer of a mammogram. It may mean life or death for some women.

390 In conclusion to our Health Services in Gibraltar, I am glad to hear from the Hon. the Chief Minister, in his address, that they, and I quote:

'Have not inherited a lot of problems with the GHA'.

395 This is certainly an endorsement of all I have said so far, and of the great legacy of the GSD in relation to Gibraltar's Health Services. Laudable as the sentiment is of the Hon. Minister for Health to provide all the GHA staff and management feel is needed, which can be done by anyone, that course of action is an unaffordable recipe for financial disaster.

400 Picking up on a female theme Mr Speaker: for the first time in Gibraltar's political history, both the Government, in the person of the Hon. Minister for Social Services, and the Opposition, with me, each have a woman on their benches. I am poignantly aware of how few of us there have been, and how few of us there are, in the political class. As I mentioned in an Opinion to the *Chronicle* for International Women's Day, I believe more could be achieved for women in Gibraltar if there was better female representation in politics. Part of that responsibility lies with those few of us who have entered politics, to ensure we do all we can to effectively represent women's issues and demonstrate the benefits of having more women in Parliament.

405 That is why I raise this issue in my Budget address today, Mr Speaker. Political parties need to take positive action to promote greater female participation. Had the GSD won this last Election, the Government would have three female Government Ministers, a very positive step indeed.

410 I welcome that we now have a Minister for Equality to highlight the issues faced by women in Gibraltar, despite little mention of this in her opinion or interview or speech on International Women's Day. To say she has worked, and still does, in a man's world and has not had any problems; that women have come a long way these last 100 years; and that one day she hopes we will never celebrate International Women's Day, because it means women would have achieved their objectives offers no hope or inspiration to the women of Gibraltar who are looking for their voice to be heard and for equality policies. It requires a political will and genuine desire to instigate change and bring balance to our society not just, as the Hon. Minister stated, and I quote:

420 'My message to girls and women out there is to remember that there is nothing stopping them from achieving the same as their male counterparts'.

As women, we still find ourselves woefully under-represented in managerial positions and on boards. It is a disgrace that all six members of the new Commission on Democratic and Parliamentary Reform are white, middle-class men, three of whom are lawyers – not one woman or minority representative; not one financier or educator. They do not represent the diversity of our community.

425 Out of 23 statutory Government-related bodies that have been gazetted so far, there are a total of around 142 members; only 17 are women, some of whom are the secretaries of the boards. Since these boards and committees have seen much movement these last few months, ousting GSD sympathisers and placing GSLP ones, one would have hoped that as a woman, the Hon. Minister for Equality would have ensured more female participation and representation in these committees that matter, that deal with influencing policy-making. There are plenty of women in Gibraltar more than capable of doing so.

430 Well, out of the 42 people who I know have been replaced so far on these boards, since this Government came into office, we have actually lost six women on these boards, to be replaced by two. I sincerely hope the future movement and replacement of members will seriously consider including more women, so they too can form part of the decision-making process of Gibraltar, of which they represent 50% of the population. I ask the Hon. Minister to take a greater interest in this aspect of her portfolio and not allow it to be the 'Cinderella' among her responsibilities.

435 The Government is still struggling to come to terms with its responsibilities, demonstrated by their Parliamentary responses which so often fail to address the public appetite for information, but instead, deflect enquiries back to what they claim was not achieved by the former GSD Government. Well, *so much was achieved*.

440 I remind this House of how 15 years of GSD Government, fixing the incalculable mess left behind by the previous GSLP Administration, has, for example, brought about significant progress in closing the gap between men and women. In the employment field, sustained professional training programmes have provided a qualitative change in the composition of middle and senior management positions in the public sector. This has broken the 'glass ceiling' that used to prevent women access to higher positions.

445 This was supported by the introduction of maternity leave and its subsequent increase; maternity grants for unmarried mothers; maternity allowance and paternity leave. The GSD introduced legislation to forbid discrimination; working married women were given opportunities to pay the difference in Social Insurance contributions to receive a full pension; widowers' and widows' pension rights were equalised; and divorced, non-working women can now share in their spouses' pensions.

A whole range of further initiatives were introduced by the GSD, such as the Breast Screening Programme; the HPV vaccination for teenage girls; a huge increase in the number of Government, free nursery places; the financial support for the creation and maintenance of the half-way house for abused women; and the professional advice given to them through dedicated counsellors and in particular the

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Citizens' Advice Bureau.
Parents are supported with the school holidays' Sports Programmes, plenty of children's parks and the new family and children's legislation. From experiences shared with me, women still find themselves struggling as single parents with erring ex-spouses. Trying to make ends meet or surviving on benefits, they are at the mercy of grey areas in law, such as access to Legal Aid and the recognition of common law relationships.

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Despite my hon. Friend, Mr Feetham, having prepared Legal Aid reform legislation, waiting to be implemented, it is shocking that this Government has only published new rules to expand Legal Aid that enables defendants, accused of complex fraud crimes, to hire expensive specialist lawyers at public expense. (Hon. D A Feetham and Hon. J J Netto: Shame!) No thought has gone into, or takes into account, the plight of single parents, mainly women, who are not entitled to Legal Aid if they own the family home or a car. This blanket rule penalises lone parents struggling with mortgage payments, and paying legal fees in order to pursue erring partners in their duty of care as a parent.

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As for common law relationships, and their rights as a couple under the law: I hope that with the new equality legislation, which deals with civil partnerships, this grey area of the law will be addressed in order for individuals within a long-term, stable, heterosexual relationship, or family members who share a home, such as siblings, be afforded the same rights as those of a married couple. Equally, the introduction of parental leave, whereby either parent is able to take entitled leave after the birth of a child, is a policy that would be welcomed by many working parents across Gibraltar.

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As I said in my International Women's Day Opinion for the *Chronicle*, and I quote:

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'Because childcare responsibilities in general still fall to women, women with children more often take low-paid, opportunity-free, part-time work and suffer economically. That we have some more women at the top of Gibraltar society is worth celebrating, however raising more women off the very bottom would be even better'.

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For a party which claims to offer a new era of openness, transparency and equality, there seems to be little emphasis and clarity in these policies in practice. Apart from the empty promises of all things to all men and women, all we have are grand statements, backed by hundreds of press releases, which only give the public an illusion of progress.

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(Applause)

Mr Speaker: The Hon. the Minister for Sports, Culture, Heritage and Youth.

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Minister for Sports, Culture, Heritage and Youth (Hon. S E Linares): Mr Speaker, it is for me a great honour and privilege to be addressing Parliament in this Appropriation Bill as a Minister of Her Majesty's Government of Gibraltar – (*Sounds of an aeroplane overhead*) A fly-past!

In the short time, I have been in Government, I have realised many things I suspected were happening negatively within Government were actually true: the lack of motivation of officers – (*Further sounds of an aeroplane overhead*)

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I seem to be honoured by a fly-past, Mr Speaker!

Mr Speaker: It's worse than heckling from the Opposition benches! (*Laughter*)

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Hon. D A Feetham: It has been arranged!

Hon. S E Linares: – the lack of motivation of officers in Government, in Authorities and Agencies; the little confidence that the GSD Government had in them and the manner that they were treated.

As Minister with responsibility for the Fire Service the first thing that was clear was the lack of motivation within the force. There were many people who felt completely ignored under the previous Administration and who felt undermined at all levels. The fact that the force was not even allowed to have a Christmas Party at the Station, which had been the norm since time immemorial, under the excuse of Health and Safety, says much about the relationship that the Fire Service had with the previous Administration.

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There were a number of issues waiting to be resolved. The one that was identified by the men, before we came into office, was that of the exhaust extractor system, which I am happy to announce, has now been procured and will soon be installed. All the other Health and Safety issues will be addressed, once the audit review is produced by Sir Ken Knight after the summer.

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We are also looking at all aspects of the Fire Service which the management and the staff are identifying that need looking in to. After this review, we will be in a position to start on another manifesto commitment: that of having a new Fire Station. This will be done not only with the recommendations of the report but also in close consultation with both management and the Firemen's Union Committee. Professional development in the form of training was underfunded and it was not only until last year that some extra funding was provided for this. Well, I am happy to state that, in this year's Budget, we have not only matched the amount that was provided a year before the Election from the previous Administration, but we have increased it even further only months after having come into Government.

In order to address this demotivation that the Fire Service has endured for many years, I arranged a number of visits to each watch and observed them performing different exercises. This has been welcomed by both the firemen and the management. It has been a privilege for me to have experienced the professionalism of these men and I have learned a great deal from these visits. It is clear to me that they are a very committed force. They know that my doors are always open to discuss anything that concerns them.

As the Minister for the Collection of Refuse, we can announce the fact that we have employed a total of seven more recruits and that two more will be employed soon. These men will man a new lorry and therefore a new route to cater for the increased demand created by the new developments that have taken place and others that will take place in the future. It is a commitment we gave the workforce during the election campaign, which we now have delivered.

One thing that I noticed as soon as I first visited the refuse depot was the disgraceful conditions that these men have endured for a long time. What was significant is that the depot had been painted and fixed on the outside, so that everybody could see it, but completely ignored in the inside where the men have to shower and change after they finish work. So much for dignity at work under the previous Administration!

I am happy to say that works have already commenced and very soon these men who do a job which is essential to our community will have a decent workplace.

Another of my portfolios is the Postal Service. In this field, I can also announce that under our Government's policy of employing long-term supply workers, we are in the process of employing three extra SOG Basics. These three employees have been doing supply work for nearly six to seven years.

Further, we have managed to give the SOG Basics this year summer hours at no cost and without any detriment to the customer. In the autumn, we will be sitting down to negotiate with the workforce and the union at the postal service to see how we can enhance the service and working practices.

As Minister for the utilities, I am very much involved in what sort of generation we will be acquiring for the future. I believe in looking closely at the environmental impact that the power generation will have on our future generations – excuse the pun. With this in mind, the Government will also be looking at having consistent power, so that we have capacity for our consumption now and also well into the future.

In relation to AquaGib, I can say that we are also looking at ways in which the production of water can be made more cost effective than at present. Government will be working closely with the company and its workforce, in order to resolve all pending matters.

As Minister for Civil Contingencies, I have found out that co-ordination with the different agencies could have been better. In fact, only by pure coincidence, for example, that the staff of the Civil Contingency Section found out that GJBS had a full container of emergency equipment for them to use, should the need arise.

Table-top exercises have not been carried out as should have been the norm. Meetings of the C3 will now be convened regularly, in order to evaluate current procedure. Further, we have employed a civil contingency press officer – who *is* a Gibraltar resident – given that the supply of information forms a crucial part of any civil contingency committee. This is in order to be in a position to inform the general public of what they should do, should we ever have an emergency situation to contend with. Further, a local graduate specialising in civil contingency has been engaged to work closely with this officer. She has already started.

As the Minister for Sports and Leisure, I would like to start my address with the King's Bastion Leisure Centre. It is well known that this centre had gone over budget by nearly £6.5 million and that the total construction cost was over £12 million. It is now encountering all sorts of problems.

In the first instance, the air conditioning system is not fit for purpose. The wrong system has been installed to cater for such a large complex and it is now not working at all. A completely new system will have to be put in place.

The Ice Skating Rink has no insulation and therefore the result is that it is constantly out of its normal temperature. This means that to keep the ice at the correct temperature all year round it costs £7,500 per month in electricity. Not only that, but the levelling machine – and this I think is a joke – for the ice, that breaks down very frequently, was situated inside the glass building which houses the ice rink before the glass was placed. The result is that the machine cannot be brought out for repairs unless you dismantle the whole glass structure or the machine itself is dismantled.

575 There are also problems with the location of essential facilities like toilets and changing rooms, which one would have thought should have been placed in the ice rink's surroundings with access from the ice rink itself. This did not happen, which means that users have to take their skating boots off every time they need to relieve themselves.

580 One more thing on the ice rink is that due to its size, no international competition can take place and it is no good for ice skating companies to perform shows in it.

585 These are not the only problems that exist in the King's Bastion Leisure Centre. The contracts that are in place with some of the operators are unbelievably negative for the Government who is the ultimate owner of the complex. Where in the world do you have an operator of what is supposed to be a business, making more profits, for employing more people and for spending huge amounts of money on general expenses? This is called an OPEX contract. The Government has to cover the operating expenses of King's Bowl operator, pay for any losses and then pay them 30% profit on top!

590 We have the anomaly that this is not applied to all operators. Therefore we have the situation that the caterers do not have the same contract and only after considerable representations were they, too, given some OPEX contract in part of the building. The people of Gibraltar should know such a lucrative contract was given to people close to the previous Chief Minister.

I move now to what is commonly known as the GASA swimming pool. The previous Administration took the decision to allow the general public to use the 25-metre swimming pool. This might have been the right decision, but as usual, there was no long-term planning for the consequences of this decision.

595 The reality is that GASA was left – GASA, i.e. the pool – still managing the pool and they hardly had money to maintain the place. Moreover, reports were made to the GSLA and the GSLA did not seem to get them so that corrective action could be taken. The result being that the changing rooms had broken tiles, the spectator platform also had tiles missing, beams were rusting, and the general state of the pool was deteriorating fast, due to the increased amount of usage after the decision to open it to the general public. As we all know, we had the whole of the duct system collapsing on to the public stand and we were extremely lucky not to have anyone hurt. The poor planning of the previous GSD Administration was responsible for this situation.

605 This prompted the new Government, in only seven months, to not only make the place safe in only three days, but also review the whole structure of the management of the pool. I am happy to say that in consultation with GASA we now have the GSLA managing the pool and GASA will not lose any of its allocations. This will benefit all users, since now the Authority is looking after all the maintenance issues.

The Government intends very soon to do major works to the pool to improve facilities. This includes the air treatment system which had been promised for many years by the previous Administration and was never delivered. Soon, we will also be announcing how we intend to save money by having alternative energy systems in place in the pool, making it a much better place for those who swim in it.

610 Another of the responsibilities of the GSLA is to maintain all the playgrounds around Gibraltar. Many of these playgrounds were built in a rush by the previous Government, with hardly any planning and at great expense to the taxpayer. This was done only for political expediency in the run-up to the last General Elections, after the playgrounds had been neglected for years.

615 I am happy to report to this House that the children who live in Moorish Castle Estate – the 'ignored' people, by the previous Administration – can now enjoy a brand new playground which we had built within the first few months of this Government coming into office.

We are now also having to spend money on fixing the one at Mid Harbours Estate because its construction under the hon. Members opposite had created a problem of water penetration in the underground parking below.

620 Continuing with Sports, Mr Speaker, I am happy to say that during the seven months we have been in office, I have met with the Gibraltar Sports Advisory Council three times and we have one other meeting scheduled for 11th July, i.e. tomorrow and I can confirm that we will be meeting at least quarterly.

I am working with the Sports and Leisure Authority with a view to be in a position to have more international sporting events staged here which we hope will serve to attract more people to Gibraltar.

625 Moving to my responsibility for Culture and Heritage, I can only start by stressing the shambolic state in which I found the whole of the Culture and Heritage Agency on coming into office. It was in such a state that one of the first things that I did was to ask the Principal Auditor to obtain all records and all documents appertaining to this Agency. Further, I asked for a value for money report on all transactions done.

630 By 23rd January, the Principal Auditor presented me with a report from which all the information I am giving in this Parliament is taken. Staff were signed on to the Agency between 16th October 2011 and 2nd November 2011. Let's not forget that by October, time was running out for the GSD – so much so that the Elections were called on 3rd November.

635 The people who were asked to sign on came from different entities, such as Knightfield Holdings, GDC, Civil Service, Gibraltar General Services Ltd, and one from no particular place. They were placed on grades with no apparent logic or methodology and no concern for value for money.

In fact, Mr Speaker, it was the CEO who was given a pay rise of 62.5% – well above the Grade 6 and personally approved by the previous Chief Minister. We had three at Grade 6 who got an increase ranging from 48.6% to 22.5%; two Grade 5s, which is the equivalent to an SEO in Government, one of whom was not even in employment; three Grade 4s; two Grade 3s; one Grade 2; and eight Grade 1s. These grades obtained a 12% over and above the Civil Service rate.

In relation to the latter, I can say that within the Grade 1s which is equivalent to an AA post – AA post, I repeat – in Government, we had a person who was a Spanish cleaner with no qualifications at all.

Two Technical Grade posts were also established. Mr Speaker, as to value for money, we saw that the total previous wage bill, which was £522,622, increased during the dates stated above, just before the Election to £740,296. This is an increase of 42% in total.

The Collective Agreement with the unions was never signed. The Board of the Agency was constituted by the Minister for Culture and Heritage on 15th November, *after* all the offers of appointment were signed, he also appointed two directors of his choice. In a meeting on 18th November 2011, three weeks before the Elections, the said Board officially appointed the CEO and all the other officers.

Mr Speaker, this just goes to show how the previous Administration used to handle things and how they, at the last minute in Government, were signing away pay rises and placing people of their choice where they pleased, in a blatant attempt to use public money in order to win votes.

Since I have been Minister for Culture and Heritage, I have restructured the Agency to be able to make it workable and I have found that the staff have been very co-operative and willing to reform the mess that the new Government had inherited.

So much so that we have been able, within the turmoil of having officers from different entities and from different unions with different pay, to organise the New Year celebration, the Spring Festival, the Miss Gibraltar gala performance and the revival of the Drama Festival.

With regard to the first Fashion Week, I would like to inform this House that we are looking at assisting the organisers to stage this event biannually, so that the next one could be some time in October. We have also assisted with four book launches and attended with two officials from the Agency, the Little Constellation workshops and exhibition, with a view to be able to bring them to Gibraltar. This is a very exciting project which we hope will benefit many people in the local art world.

We have also been able to organise a bigger and better Calentita, which was one of our manifesto commitments, and Gibraltar's first Jazz Festival, about which we have had many positive reports in the international press. We have been told that quite a number of people have visited Gibraltar specifically for this event.

Mr Speaker, one more thing to add to the above events has been the celebrations of the Diamond Jubilee of our Majesty, the Queen. When we came into office the committee that was constituted by the previous Minister for Culture had hardly met. In fact, in 2010, when they were thinking of the Diamond Jubilee a tentative committee was formed. This committee never met. It was not until 18th October 2011, two weeks before the Elections were called, that the new committee met to start preparations for this event.

A further meeting was to be held on 9th November. It was clear to me that not much had been prepared and that even at this late stage, it was only a question of general ideas floating around. Once we got into office and seeing the lack of preparation with regard to the celebrations, which were to start the first day of the year, i.e. 1st January, the new Government decided to increase the number of members on the committee. We included the Convent representative who previously could only communicate with the committee through the then Chief Secretary, i.e. No. 6. The Mayor was also included, as were members of the MOD, Commonwealth Society and others who were keen to contribute towards these celebrations.

Mr Speaker, the House will know that the weekend of the 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 5th June was a great success. Soon after this, my Ministry and the Agency were very involved in the preparations for the Royal Visit of the Earl and Countess of Wessex. This visit ended, as we all saw, with the projection on the North Face of Her Majesty's Rock of the Union flag, our own Gibraltar flag and two images of Her Majesty the Queen.

As the Chief Minister announced, the Ministry for Culture will be moving from the Ince's Hall to the City Hall. This will place the Ministry of Culture in its rightful place in the centre of town.

Turning to heritage, I cannot ignore the fact that the previous Administration spent a great deal of money on Harding's Battery. For those of you who do not know where this is, I can tell you that it is the Battery at Europa Point. We can all remember the song and dance that was made by the Chief Minister, now the Leader of the Opposition – who seems to have left the Chambers – and his Deputy, in the inauguration ceremony for the whole of the Europa Point. I know that my hon. Friend and Colleague, the Hon. Dr. Cortes at the time rightly boycotted such events, due to the manner in which the project ignored advice on the type of vegetation that should have been planted.

Be that as it may, Harding's Battery was opened with the press, cameras etc, and we have subsequently found out that, with so much fuss, it was closed on the same day. Mr Speaker, I am pleased to say that we have now opened it to the public.

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I would like to continue with the news that was released at the end of May regarding the Gorham's Cave Complex. The United Kingdom Government has put forward the Cave Complex for World Heritage Site status. We have been given the target date of January 2015 for the submission of the nomination to UNESCO. There are many hurdles still on our way, but the possibility is now there that the Gorham's Cave Complex could become a World Heritage Site by June or July of 2016. Government will therefore be dedicating significant efforts over the next two years to ensure that our nomination will have the greatest chance of success.

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A major component of Government policy is to involve all stakeholders. A major player in heritage is the Gibraltar Heritage Trust. I am pleased to inform this House that the new Government has established a good relationship with this institution.

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Mr Speaker, I know that one major area that the Trust has been keen to progress for many years now is the development of the new heritage legislation. We have discussed this in the Heritage Action Committee and I am pleased to inform that the Heritage Division is in active discussion with the Gibraltar Heritage Trust so that we may deliver the appropriate piece of legislation at the earliest opportunity.

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While on the subject of the Gibraltar Heritage Trust, I can confirm Government's intention to support its work and we can see an increase this year in its annual grant and also by providing a significant capital expenditure towards the refurbishment of their offices at the Main Guard in John Mackintosh Square. There will be other projects which we will be working on together with the Gibraltar Heritage Trust.

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The Grand Battery project – which was a project conceived by the previous Administration – will be completed and works are already in hand. We will recall that there was little or no consultation with stakeholders until the new Government came into office.

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Continuing with the policy of involving stakeholders, I know that there is a lot of interest from the general public in helping us and there are sites that lend themselves for collaborative work. Led by our team, Devil's Gap has been cleaned up and painted under the guidance of the Gibraltar Heritage Trust. I also know that there are groups, like the Gibraltar Historical Society, who are doing excellent voluntary work under their own volition.

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Recently an informal forum has been set up, which has met on one occasion so far, involving the Gibraltar Heritage Trust and other NGOs, with a view to co-ordinating efforts. The involvement of the community in heritage work is something that we wish to encourage, provided it is done in a planned and controlled manner under expert supervision.

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In relation to the Heritage Action Committee, we are meeting regularly. I have already indicated my intention to meet with greater frequency than has been the case until now. This has been welcomed by the Committee. This Committee will take a proactive stance to heritage.

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Government is keen to protect our heritage at all levels. Therefore, since we came into office, we have taken three initiatives: one has been to create an inter-Ministerial committee which comprises the Deputy Chief Minister, the Minister for Tourism, the Minister for the Environment and myself, as Minister for Heritage. Each Ministry in turn invites their officers to attend these meetings, in order for them to be in a position to co-ordinate action plans for the smooth running of the new Government's initiatives. We have already established the fact that all projects will have to go through an environmental filter and also a heritage filter.

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The second initiative is that we have set up an arrangement with a small local business who are employing trainees. I will refer to them as our 'Heritage Crew'. This team is already doing sterling work in refurbishing Parson's Lodge. Our aim is to provide training in heritage-related skills to these young people. In this way, we will develop a sound base for the youth able to conserve and restore our heritage assets. Government is deploying capital funds for refurbishment of heritage assets.

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The third initiative is that of establishing a team of two civil servants, one who had been completely ignored for years and is very qualified in IT. He is compiling a database of all Government's assets in relation to pictures, artifacts, documents, etc. We are working closely with the Culture and Heritage Agency, the Archives and the Museum. We are hoping that this database, which will take years to compile, will be available online for people to access. We are still at the embryonic stage, but we are all excited as to how it is developing.

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I would like to mention our Museum, before I conclude. I was present at this year's open day and saw first-hand the public support for this institution. I also saw the interest it generated with the Earl and Countess of Wessex, when they visited it last month. Government is keen to develop further the Museum's potential. The Museum is encouraging volunteers to help with its project and become involved as 'Friends of the Museum'.

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I conclude with our view of heritage for the future. We have many untapped gems in Gibraltar and I will work with my tourism and environmental colleagues to ensure that this jewel is no longer left abandoned as it has been for years. We will look at ways of giving it all a high profile.

760 As Minister for the Youth, I am happy to say that all youth clubs are open and that we are working towards having them opened during the weekend. The Laguna Youth Club is back to normal, after the Minister for Social Services kindly returned them these premises for the use it was originally designed for. Further, we are trying to recruit more volunteers to participate in programs designed for the youth.

765 The Youth Service will be working closely with the Heritage Division of the Culture and Heritage Agency in developing programmes which will help to encourage our young people to take an interest in our heritage – after all, it also belongs to them – and to improve our heritage sites. The youth leader and the youth workers are in the process of writing a policy for the Youth Service, which was one of the recommendations of the review conducted in 2008 and is well overdue. Once this policy is in place, we will be in a better position to encourage our youth in the many exciting projects that we have in mind.

770 Mr Speaker, since we came into office, the Government has been working very hard to achieve our objectives and I am confident, that together with the vast amount of local talent that we have in all fields, we will get there. With this, I conclude my first Budget speech as a Minister. I would like to thank everyone in the different Ministries, Authorities, Agencies and Companies that comprise my portfolios for embracing the changes that the new Government has embarked upon.

775 Thank you.

(Applause)

Mr Speaker: The Hon. the Minister for Housing and the Elderly.

780 **Minister for Housing and the Elderly (Hon. C A Bruzon):** Mr Speaker, in line with the feelings of honour expressed by my Parliamentary colleagues, it is indeed an honour also for me to stand here today in Parliament, for the first time indeed as a Minister, to address you all. But I do so also with a great sense of responsibility.

785 May I thank the electorate for making this possible, and in entrusting me as part of the Government in directing Housing Services which, dare I say, is perceived by many as quite a challenging portfolio. I am proud to be of service to the community and will continue to carry out my role to the best of my ability to all the members of our community. This Government, which is your Government, their Government, is determined to help, assist, and shape public services in such a way so that everyone may benefit.

790 Secondly, as this is my first Budget speech as Housing Minister, I wish to go back to the General Election. At the time, people use to stop me in the street quite frequently to complain about housing or to discuss personal problems that they had encountered. Even then, I could appreciate the complexities that are shared within the delivery of such a service. It touches so many aspects of community life and environment.

795 For example, some people waiting to be discharged from hospital, in many cases, depend on modifications to bathroom facilities; or indeed, the elderly, who as they grow older may need alterations to their homes. Similarly, as people marry and families expand, they need to stretch accommodation needs to suit new siblings. Or indeed, families may wish to take care of parents, and in some cases, regrettably this may include caring for loved ones struck by illness and so many other challenges in life. This in part may require additional rooms, space, facilities, in order to improve quality of living.

800 Additionally, repairs may have to be prioritised for those that are unemployed, in receipt of Social Security or indeed, there may be others with little disposable income, or pensioners, unable to pay for minor repairs. Service users come from a wide area within our community and it is only now that I am beginning to share the deeper knowledge and understanding of my work that often consists of having to prioritise, introduce policies that are fair, and touch positively upon everyone in our society.

805 It is, Mr Speaker, an almost impossible task, given the very few houses built in the past 16 years, but I am fortunate indeed to share such concerns with staff that are professional, extremely diligent and caring in the work they do and although I remember often the Housing Department being on the receiving end of criticism, may I stress that I have only admiration for those public servants who have to attend to people, sometimes desperate for an immediate solution to be found. It is difficult to find the right balance and to prioritise for those most vulnerable and demanding cases.

810 Mr Speaker, I wish to reinforce our Government's message that we are here for everyone, that is, for our loyal supporters, yes indeed, and also for those who did not necessarily support our manifesto, which contains commitments that are indeed comprehensive, modern and deliverable. In this endeavour, the Government will introduce whatever reforms are necessary; and wherever practically possible, these will be geared to achieving practical aims and not simply reactionary. Essentially, this will be done strategically by virtue of, first, prioritising funding where it is most needed; secondly introducing capital works for major refurbishment programmes within past abandoned estates, inclusive of maximising opportunities in constructing additional floor levels for a greater supply of accommodation for those patiently waiting for Government housing; thirdly, boosting greater attention to bath-to-shower conversions and indeed, modifications approved by the Gibraltar Health Authority's Occupational

Therapists; fourthly, reforming the Housing Works Agency including how its services are to be discharged and directed that is achievable and not pie in the sky; in fifth place, also reforming the Housing Act; number (6), commencing the construction of co-ownership and rental housing schemes; and finally, number (7), it is most important, that we listen to and hear our tenants, about their concerns, their grievances and at all times show a sympathetic and human approach in dealing with their needs.

Number (1) – prioritising funding: Mr Speaker, the Government is determined to ensure that appropriate funding is directed to projects that (1) will benefit Government tenants; (2) target areas which are in serious need of repair; and (3), where practically and technically feasible, focus on constructing additional floor levels to assist those on the Housing Waiting Lists.

Though the former Administration did admittedly pursue capital works in many Government estates, I regret that this was done at the expense of others which were completely abandoned, namely Glacis, Moorish Castle and Laguna Estates. Apart from minor response maintenance and emergency repairs, they have had little development, to the detriment of our tenants.

It is because of the seriousness of this lack of attention in maintenance, that this Government will pursue a comprehensive and integrated system of waterproofing. In addition, due to the nature in which construction has historically taken place, it will be possible to build additional flooring as part of the lift installation programme, thus enabling homes to be allocated for Government housing applicants.

May I add that the necessary feasibility studies have now been completed and any funding arrangements will be introduced accordingly, in order to commence with such urgent works. This is in line with our Government manifesto commitments, as we are determined to ensure that our forgotten Government tenants are properly and fairly treated like any other tenants that have enjoyed the benefits of major repairs and refurbishment.

It is precisely because of this fact that it was decided to ensure that many of these tenants would have the opportunity of seeing and meeting their Royal Highnesses, the Earl and Countess of Wessex during the Diamond Jubilee celebrations. As in all of our community, Government tenants of Moorish Castle and Laguna Estate did us proud in the welcome and elegance of their cheer towards Prince Edward and his wife, who were greatly moved by the outpouring of affection. We, in this Government, will not abandon these equally deserving tenants and will ensure that they are treated with the dignity and given the service that they deserve.

Number (2) – other capital works: Mr Speaker, in order to assist in this campaign, a total of £1 million will initially be budgeted for capital works, though this amount will be extended where necessary to cater for other major repairs. In addition to what I mentioned earlier, the Government will continue with major repairs at Harrington Building, Churchill House, South Pavilion Building, Bado’s Building, Governor’s Meadow House, Alameda Estate, whilst at Schomberg Buildings, major works have now been successfully completed. May I also add that a major and comprehensive window replacement programme has recently got underway at Chilton Court.

Mr Speaker, one of our main concerns when entering Government was the length of time taken by the Housing Works Agency to turnover (a) the cleaning and (b) refurbishments of flats. In the majority of cases, these appear to be excessive delays. Therefore, in order to tackle the backlog head on and reduce the unacceptable delays, the Government, as a matter of policy, outsourced the cleaning and refurbishment activities. This major exercise will be complemented by the re-introduction of the self-repair system which was stopped by the former Administration back in April 2011.

Mr Speaker, may I firstly highlight that in line with the Government’s collective approach, the Housing Department has worked closely with the Employment and Training Board whereby the latter has introduced mechanisms to ensure that construction companies employ local residents. This twofold strategy has (a) injected a much needed boost to small locally registered construction companies to undertake cleaning and refurbishment activities for the Housing Department; and (b) introduced a process whereby the recruitment of local residents is prioritised.

All that said, the Housing Works Agency continues to clean and refurbish housing stock, though at a more manageable level, whilst because of the private sector input, both the backlog is being systematically eroded and unacceptable delays will hopefully be a thing of the past.

This results in both the public and private sectors benefiting from work and in addition, this is an example of two large Government Departments working closely together towards mutual goals for the benefit of large numbers of families in Gibraltar.

Mr Speaker, the fact is that some Government tenants do not wish to wait for refurbishment; rather they may wish to take ownership and directly carry out repairs themselves. Therefore, in order to facilitate such empowerment, the Government has decided to re-introduce a system of self-repair, though with a difference. Unlike before, whereby the onus was on tenants to approach construction/building material suppliers via a voucher system, the new approach is to maximise further the Housing Works Agency’s storing facilities, and facilitate self-repair by the latter, transporting agreed materials directly from the Centralised Depot to the allocated Government flat.

This effectively removes any onus on the tenant to be left with the burden of (a) transporting the said materials, (b) ensuring that there are no unnecessary delays incurred by suppliers and (c) that tenants are not held to ransom by some suppliers who simply do not produce specified tendered materials because of lack of storage, all of which will be detrimental to Government tenants.

Mr Speaker, as far as maintenance and repairs is concerned, all the above measures, including those mentioned earlier, are a clear demonstration of this Government's total commitment to all our tenants. Insofar as empty Government flats are concerned, many of these were abandoned for years by the former Administration and, regrettably, left to deteriorate beyond economic repair. These empty buildings will be put out to tender to the general public, though preference will be given to purchasers that are (1) on the Housing Waiting List and/or (2) tenants already in occupation of a Government flat that wish to release their dwelling as part of the exchange. Again, this will help generate those areas in the Upper Town that have been abandoned by the former Administration.

In addition, the Government will seek ways of improving infrastructure in the Upper Town area to facilitate vehicular access and parking. In addition, there will be improved play areas for our toddlers and youngsters, so that they may play safely and enjoy recreational facilities. Already, improvements have been introduced at Moorish Castle, whereby we were honoured as I said earlier, by their Royal Highnesses the Earl and Countess of Wessex's recent inauguration.

Number (3) – specific modifications for Government tenants: Mr Speaker, as I mentioned in my introduction that the Government will be focusing much greater attention towards tenants who need that additional bit of help, particularly those whose lives have drastically changed because of medical and/or personal circumstances. With this in mind, we have already embarked on a comprehensive programme of bath to shower conversion, through Gibraltar Joinery Building Services Ltd (GJBS), a Government owned company. I can confirm that we have made real in-roads on the long waiting list of tenants, many of whom have waited years for such facilities. For example, all those tenants waiting for a bath-to-shower conversion last January/February have already had their units fitted.

Mr Speaker, may I add, that specialist alterations and/or modifications will continue as previously accommodated through the former Administration, though these would require input from the Gibraltar Health Authority's Occupational Therapy Unit. For example, it was noted upon entering Government, that there were a vast amount of tenants waiting for modifications at Albert Risso House; this, despite the fact that the building had just recently been constructed.

Nevertheless, there were numerous tenants whose flats required specialist attention and modifications. Again, I can confirm that this has been prioritised, as the Government is determined to help those in our community who are in real need of our intervention.

Number (4) – Housing Works Agency: Mr Speaker, there has been much debate about how the former Buildings and Works operated, its share of problems and complaints, particularly its role and purpose. Now that this has been restructured into the Housing Works Agency by the former Administration not so much attention was focused on our Technical Department.

The separation of the Buildings and Works into the Housing Works Agency meant that officers previously engaged on similar work at the same grade and salary in the Buildings and Works and the Housing Department did not get the same opportunity to opt to transfer from the Civil Service status to that of Agency employee at an enhanced salary. The effect of this has meant that some of our staff who continued in the Housing Department felt that they should not have been denied access to the early exit package or to transfer out of the Civil Service.

To address this issue, the Government took the view that it should commission an internal report, in order to identify areas where greater efficiency and application of resources could be maximised. I am pleased to state that this report has been completed and the Government will be proceeding to explain the nature and role of the Agency, to enable it to accommodate additional responsibilities to accept the transfer of additional staff.

The Agency will be more efficiently run by those technically competent to do so and allowed to operate as a proper modern maintenance organisation, thus moving deliberately away from past 'cap-in-hand' practices, which, incidentally and regularly was the case on an annual basis at the former Buildings and Works and duly ignored and dismissed by the former Administration, despite Mr Speaker, continuous and regular approaches made by senior management, expressing a shortage of funds. This meant that the backlog of jobs for minor repairs simply grew over a number of years and created unnecessary delays for works to be completed.

Mr Speaker, in addition, training will be essential to the success of the Agency's ability to deliver an improved service. Therefore, the Government will introduce training to facilitate operational staff in order: (a) to maximise operational capability; and (b) create greater customer awareness, so that staff become much more in tune with the needs of Government tenants.

Number (5) – reforms to the Housing Act 2007: Mr Speaker, as you will already be aware, the Government has decided to do away with the Housing Tribunal, as it was felt that such a platform was ineffective. It did not operate properly and neither did it represent a real transparent mechanism for

945 appeals to be lodged by members of the public. Instead, the Government will introduce legislative powers, so that the Ombudsman is able to intervene on housing matters that are considered unfair and unreasonable.

We believe that the Ombudsman is the right and most appropriate authority to guard against unfairness and maladministration. The Government, therefore, aims to change the current legislation accordingly, to introduce and facilitate such ambitions, very shortly.

950 Mr Speaker, I have also been made aware of issues affecting private tenants, particularly the general lack of protection afforded to them within the Housing Act. This must be addressed and a proper balance pursued between the needs of both private landlords and private tenants. We, therefore, intend to modify the Act in order to correct such anomalies and I have asked my hon. Friend and colleague, the Minister for Justice to assist me in this process.

955 Number (6) – co-ownership and rental housing schemes: Mr Speaker, firstly may I acknowledge and reiterate that the former Administration did indeed provide accommodation and new homes for our community. The Mid Harbour Estate and Waterport Terraces are good examples of these efforts. However, our main concern stems from the fact that the process took an excessive and inexplicable length of time to materialise.

960 I am also concerned about the quality, maybe poor quality of some other estates delivered in time, namely parts of Bay View, Nelson’s View and Cumberland Terraces, which have already required attention as they were rushed into completion. These require repairs already and will cost the taxpayer millions to deal with the negligence. Moreover not enough properties were delivered in the 16 years of Government, thus condemning a number of people to the housing waiting list.

965 Mr Speaker, the Government in its first few months of administration has already earmarked preferential sites and has determined the numbers of accommodation units for completion. Very quickly we have undertaken an extensive exercise to verify the ‘needs’ of eligible members of our community in this regard.

970 Forgive me if I do not enter into any specific details here today, as I have no wish to pre-empt what will be the subject of an imminent Government announcement.

Nevertheless, the Government is determined to meet its obligations and the general public will witness ‘the laying of bricks’, to excuse the pun, very shortly as stated in our manifesto commitments. These homes will be fit for purpose, modern in design but most importantly be constructed for our people bearing in mind their specific needs, and of course, environmentally friendly.

975 Number (7) – listening to and hearing our tenants: one of the main observations whilst in Opposition was the number of complaints that I received from Government tenants who tried accessing former Ministers for Housing to discuss their specific housing problems. Many reported that they simply were unable to obtain an appointment, whilst others complained about the long waiting time for such opportunity to meet face-to-face. Understandably, this results in frustration for the tenant or applicant who is eager to express himself/herself and as often is the case, it involves rather complex issues that may relate to medical problems, break-up in relationships and/or marriage, anti-social behaviour, allocation of Government flats, position and length of time awaiting allocation, delays in repairs, property sales, etc. It is indeed an exhaustive list of issues, and sometimes matters may relate or fall under the responsibility of other Government Departments. Nevertheless, Housing seems to be the first point of call for many people.

985 Consequently, and despite enormous efforts to see as many people as possible, there continues to be a lengthy list of those waiting to see me, but I am determined to persevere and see as many people as I possibly can, as I feel very strongly about the fact that often, people just want to be heard, acknowledged, and helped, if possible. This continues to be my goal.

990 Well, Mr Speaker, the Government has major challenges ahead with respect to housing, which affects all people and walks of life. We are determined not to fail the electorate and mean what we say about meeting our manifesto commitments. With this in mind, we will do everything possible to help our citizens with their housing needs and concerns, and we will go the extra mile to accomplish this.

995 May I finally take a moment, Mr Speaker, to extend my gratitude to members of staff at the Housing Department and Agency. I am fully aware that the majority take their work very, very seriously. I regularly see on a day-to-day basis, acts of real professionalism and dedication which dare I say, go unmentioned or highlighted. May I thank all of you who are listening for your continued support and co-operation.

1000 May I also, Mr Speaker, publicly express my sincere gratitude to all participants of Government tenants’ associations and very importantly, members of the Housing Allocation Committee who give up their own valuable time, and on a voluntary basis. They do so because of their strong sense of community spirit and the result is that they contribute greatly in moulding the services provided. Thank you all for being part of what I like to call ‘our Housing Family’ and I hope to continue enjoying your collective contributions and support towards helping our tenants and ultimately, our community as a whole.

1005 Thank you, Mr Speaker.

(Applause)

Mr Speaker: The Hon. Edwin Reyes.

1010 **Hon. E J Reyes:** Mr Speaker, the GSLP/Liberal manifesto for the 2011 Elections did not have much to say in respect of heritage matters. In fact little importance was given to heritage issues, thereby resulting in only six sentences, occupying 12 lines of print, being dedicated to this area of governance. In contrast, the GSD committed itself to complete projects which it had already begun, as well as listing its exciting vision for future and new heritage related projects.

1015 The present Government inherited updated legislation together with newly appointed Trustees of the Gibraltar Garrison Library. We sincerely hope that the Government and the Trust will work together with enthusiasm and in close consultation, so that this Library and its assets will become an important facility for the people of Gibraltar.

1020 Although now in Opposition, the GSD continues to recommend the Gibraltar Government Archives be transferred into a refurbished ex-*Chronicle* Printing Works building next door to the Library, so that together they may operate as a modern, well resourced Gibraltar Archives and Reference/Research facility including digitalised searchable data.

1025 Updated legislation for the management and preservation of our heritage and the listing and preservation of buildings needs to be completed. In this respect, work was already at an advanced stage, thanks to the GSD's initiative whilst in Government, with drafting undertaken, in close consultation with relevant experts and the Gibraltar Heritage Trust. It is now up to the present Government to embark upon drafting legislation in this important area, which the community expects to be undertaken as soon as possible.

1030 The present Government has acted responsibly in continuing to pursue UNESCO World Heritage status for Gorham's Cave and adjacent sites. Indeed, much work had already been done by the Museum Team, during my tenure as Minister for Heritage, in respect of submitting nomination forms and supporting documentation, etc. I take this opportunity to thank and congratulate the Heritage Division staff involved in having achieved such a high ranking status in the United Kingdom's nomination process.

1035 In wishing the Museum Team all the very best for the future in their ongoing excavations at Gorham's and Vanguard's Caves, I urge the Government to also offer their full support – especially in respect of finalising improved land access to these extremely important prehistorical sites. Government has a duty to preserve all historical sites and assets which the community inherits. So therefore, I strongly recommend that the Government looks into the manner King's Bastion was conscientiously both preserved and turned into a leisure centre, catering for present day needs. This is an ideal way of preserving our past, alongside giving today's community the leisure and social facilities it rightfully deserves and desires.

1040 Mr Speaker, through the collective celebration of social events, participating Gibraltarians contribute towards reinforcing our identity, culture and history as a people and as a community. Both the performing and fine arts fraternities always prove themselves to be very proactive within their own specialised areas. These cultural groups now patiently await the implementation of the Government's promises as made through their manifesto commitments.

1045 Amongst the first of the promises to have already materialised has been the International Jazz Festival for which provision of £100,000 is made in this year's Estimates. Given this substantial amount going towards just one form of musical entertainment, other disciplines within the local performing arts fraternity have high hopes of increased cultural grants coming their way.

1050 In this present day and age, the local community expects its Government to support and assist our own home grown budding musicians, singers, actors, artists, etc, and provide them with facilities which allows them to achieve their full potential. Through its manifesto, the Government adopted the slogan 'culture needs to be nurtured.' Now that they are in office, Gibraltar sincerely hopes that this will not become an empty promise.

1055 Amongst its many Election promises, the Government committed itself to provide facilities for teaching of music and instruments to young people; establishment and funding for a Gibraltar Philharmonic Orchestra; run a 'learn an instrument' campaign amongst young people; establishment of an academy of the performing arts, administered by an Arts Council; refurbishment of the Ince's Hall area and enclose the patio in a modern way to allow its use even in winter; development of a new, modern theatre for Gibraltar; seek to establish Gibraltar as part of the touring circuit for UK and Spanish theatre productions. I therefore now, Mr Speaker, have to ask, when will these projects become a reality?

1060 Mr Speaker, the GSD has always seen sports and leisure as an essential element of a high quality of life – embracing entertainment and leisure, family life and quality time, healthy life styles and robust youth character formation and orientation. It has always been the GSD's policy to be supportive of and assist our own sporting bodies to overcome Spanish inspired attempts to block membership of international governing bodies. The Opposition wishes to reassure Gibraltar's sporting fraternity that we

will continue to back pending applications for international membership in respect of all our sporting associations, inclusive of Gibraltar's longstanding bid to join the Olympic movement.

1070 We take this opportunity to congratulate our very own Georgina Cassar on being selected to form part of Team GB, in the Rhythmic Gymnastics disciplines, at the forthcoming London 2012 Olympics. Alongside her, we also congratulate Nathan Stagno, who will form part of the international team of elite umpires with responsibility to officiate at hockey matches in the Olympics. We live in hope that, in the not too distant future, other Gibraltarians will also participate in the Olympics, both as athletes and officials. However, our expectations are that this should be not as part of Team GB, but rather in our own right, under the nomenclature and flag of Gibraltar.

1075 Although the local community already enjoys both good quality and a wide variety of sporting facilities, there are always areas where these can be improved upon and/or expanded. It was with this in mind that the GSD pledged to convert the recently acquired Europa Sports Fields into further facilities for use by our local sporting fraternity, catering mainly for cricket, rugby, football and football training and other sports. There is, Mr Speaker, already a degree of fear among some local sporting associations that the Europa Sports Fields may end up being developed and allocated for exclusive use by only one sole sporting association. This, if true, could end up in the curtailing of facilities already enjoyed by other sporting bodies, and even pose a threat to the existing membership of their relevant international governing body. We sincerely hope that Government very carefully considers all options and looks into the consequences, before taking final and definitive decisions.

1080 It is extremely important that the Sports Ministry always works in close consultation with the wide-ranging membership of the Gibraltar Sports Advisory Council and the development of new and additional facilities should be no exception to this.

1085 Provision continues to be made in the Estimates for sports grants. However, the local sporting fraternity patiently waits to hear further details of their promised Elite Athlete Assistance and Assistance for Non-recognised Sports. Some sportsmen and sportswomen already wonder if these schemes will become a reality. Likewise, Gibraltar's martial arts fraternity looks forward to having a worthy centre of their own – again, as promised in the run-up to the last General Elections.

1090 In rounding up these few points I have selected and highlighted in respect of cultural and sporting matters, I must ask if Government have already found the appropriate area or location in which all the different cultural and sporting facilities will be based. Let me remind Government, they promised these would be modern and new with improved facilities. It will be a centre for all social and sporting groups – concludes their manifesto promise. Mr Speaker, when will these pledges become a reality?

1095 Mr Speaker, during its last term in office, the GSD built around 500 new rental homes, completed 140 homes for the elderly in the form of Albert Risso House, allocated a record number of flats to people on the medical and social lists and eliminated the waiting lists that existed for these categories at the start of their last term. In answer to Question 543/2012, the Minister for Housing confirmed there are at present 1,677 applicants on the Government's Housing Waiting Lists. These are made up of 1,064 on the waiting list proper and a further 63 on the pre-list.

1100 The GSLP/Liberal manifesto has a few pages with colour photographs of their vision for new homes to be made available during their term in office. These projects promise both co-ownership and rental homes, supposedly with solar power facilities, as well as roof gardens and eco-friendly designs. However, during the GSLP's previous eight years in Government, no new homes for rental were built, so the local community still waits to see what will actually be delivered during this current term.

1105 I urge the present Minister for Housing to personally ensure that any new homes built do not suffer from numerous defects, as history shows was the case in their construction of co-ownership homes when they were last in office. Quality in construction of family homes cannot be compromised under any circumstances. We hope that this time round they will have learnt from previous mistakes.

1110 The Government's manifesto makes reference to the establishment of a separate additional housing list for applicants who are currently living in Spain and who wish to return home. However, barely three months after the Elections, in answer to Question 300/2012, the Minister for Housing said, during the March Parliamentary session, that no separate housing list had been opened for applicants currently living in Spain. Furthermore, he unashamedly revealed that the demand is literally very limited.

1115 Given the real facts – as now stated by the Hon. Minister in this House – it has become clearly evident that the criticisms previously levelled against the GSD Government were merely a contrivance to make the electorate believe there were scores of Gibraltarians forced to live in Spain, simply because the GSD was not providing accommodation for them here in Gibraltar. The true facts, as now revealed personally by the Hon. Minister in this House, prove that the GSLP/Liberals comments on this matter were politically insincere and even factually wrong.

1120 Under their section dedicated to Youth, the GSLP/Liberal manifesto states that young people who are entitled to housing will not wait more than three years for a home. Given that there are presently a large number of young people registered as applicants seeking their own homes, conscientiously hoping to move on in a responsible manner with their own adult lives and without continuing to be dependent upon

1130 their parents, I must ask on their behalf for a firm commitment from Government in respect of this promise. Government's answer should include expected rental housing completion dates.

The GSD worked hard in consultation with the relevant union to reform the old Buildings and Works Department and its transfer into the Housing Works Agency. This project provided brand new workshops and depots – and from its origins delivered vastly improved services to Government tenants. Furthermore, an agreement was reached with the union to the effect that manning levels would be replaced in future
1135 with one new employee employed by the Agency for every two who retire.

Through his answer to Question 430/2012, the Minister for Housing confirmed that since December 2011, a total of five employees have been transferred and a further four retired from the Housing Agency. However, no new employees have been taken on by the Agency and this clearly is in breach of the agreement reached with the union.

1140 Furthermore, Mr Speaker, despite there being a statutory obligation, Government decided to abolish the post of Chief Executive Officer of the Housing Agency. This unexpected and sudden course of action raises concerns amongst the electorate at large that Government are embarking on a campaign of chopping the heads of those perceived to be their opponent's supporters. This action, together with the manner in which Luis Montiel, my old colleague, has still not been reinstated into his previous position of
1145 employment, after he stood down as a Member of this House, has led many public servants to even fear that middle and top management positions will in future be allocated only to those whom the Government trust as their own party's supporters.

1150 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** That was *before* 8th December!

Mr Speaker: Order! Order!

1155 **Hon. E J Reyes:** Furthermore, Mr Speaker, this year's Estimates show that the Government has no intention of appointing either a Chief Executive or Deputy Chief Executive of the Housing Works Agency. This therefore raises a question of how and by whom will this important Department be managed?

Through answers given to Questions during the June session of Parliament, the Minister for Housing stated that a total of 1,987 tenants were listed as requiring a total of 640 internal and 3,243 external jobs to be carried out. The Opposition hopes that adequate human resources will be provided to the Housing Works Agency, so they may carry out their duties in a timely and efficient manner, thus ensuring that Government tenants are able to enjoy living in their homes in the rightful and dignified manner they are entitled to.
1160

The Opposition knows there are many excellent craftsmen and professionals within the Housing Works Agency. I must stress that it is important to ensure that the correct and proper administration procedures and resources are in place for housing maintenance and repairs to be carried out. Therefore, it is regrettable to see that, for this financial year, the Agency's workforce is reduced from a grand total of 160 employees catered for in the previous financial year now down to 146. How then will the Agency be expected to carry out its duties, more so with a promised and therefore expected increase in housing rental stock, if the Agency is not given the human resources required to meet workloads and targets?
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There are already signs that repairs are taking far too long, or not even being listed for action, in rental estates. For example, Mr Speaker, many tenants are asking me why is one of the lifts at Bow Wave House at Mid Harbours Estate still not repaired since it broke down around Christmas time. Lack of timely action in respect of routine maintenance and repairs further leads many people to ask, is Government really going to deliver with good quality results in respect of its promises for the refurbishment, beautification and maintenance of housing estates?
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1175

Mr Speaker, the Government has only been in office for seven months and we have been careful, in the public interest, to allow them enough space to develop their own policies. Therefore, I wish to reassure Government, and in particular the Ministers whom I shadow, that I remain always ready to work collegiately within this House, when embarking in reasonable and responsible initiatives so that, together, we may improve the quality of life of this precious community of ours. I sincerely hope Government will accept this genuine offer in the spirit it is intended.
1180

Mr Speaker: The Hon. the Minister for Tourism, Public Transport and the Port.

1185 **Minister for Tourism, Public Transport and the Port (Hon. N F Costa):** Mr Speaker, whereas this my fifth Budget Address, it is not an exaggeration to say that I feel immensely privileged to deliver my maiden Budget address as Minister for Her Majesty's Government of Gibraltar for Tourism, Public Transport and the Port. I am also honoured, Mr Speaker, by the trust vested by the people of Gibraltar to represent them in the affairs of Government.

1190 I know I speak for all my Cabinet colleagues, when I say that we are enthused and that we are entirely
 committed to implement what is undoubtedly an exciting programme for Government and a contract, Mr
 Speaker, that will not only benefit all Gibraltarians but which will, once and for all, provide that quantum
 leap, Mr Speaker, in the political development of a country as rightly demanded by a majority of
 1195 Gibraltarians. Any objective observer, Mr Speaker – amongst which, I cannot certainly include any of the
 Members opposite, in the light of their contributions so far – will agree with me that the new Government
 has already met, in seven months in office, a good number, a sound number of the manifesto
 commitments and is therefore well poised to deliver even more during this financial year. Just yesterday,
 Mr Speaker, the Hon. the Chief Minister and my Hon. Ministerial colleagues announced even further
 manifesto commitments that have been met during the last seven months alone. (*Applause*)

1200 Mr Speaker, the Hon. the Chief Minister has entrusted me with a wide portfolio of responsibilities and
 I intend to take these in turn.

In the first instance, I intend to set out the Government’s various achievements in the last six months,
 as well as highlighting the projects that the Government will undertake this financial year. The
 pleasantries, Mr Speaker, end here, because, whilst highlighting the many Government accomplishments
 1205 in only seven months in the manifesto commitments I will not just take, Mr Speaker, but in fact seize the
 opportunity to highlight the more outrageous instances of political mismanagement of the previous
 Administration and no amount of protestation from the Opposition benches will deter us from addressing
 in this House what can properly, truly and best be described as the electorally ‘big lies’ of the party
 opposite during this last Election campaign. (**Several Members:** Hear, hear!)

1210 Mr Speaker, what the hon. Members opposite cannot do – or at least they cannot do without with any
 degree of political integrity and credibility – is to cry foul and to pretend to suffer some mortal wounds
 and then soliloquise about them in this House, and then when we criticise their policy failures as a result
 of which we have – during the financial year that we share – had to act to redress and address those same
 1215 policy catastrophes, some of which I will highlight later. Such statements, Mr Speaker, are perfectly valid
 and pertinent and I will explain to the Hon. Mr Figueras why such statements are particularly valid and
 relevant in the light of the Hon. the Leader of the Opposition’s statements to me in past Budget
 contributions.

But, does the GSD think, Mr Speaker, that they can adopt purely baseless and partisan political
 1220 postures and that we will not rise to set the record straight? Further still, Mr Speaker, if the Hon. Mr
 Figueras really thinks that when a new Government, barely seven months in office, is acting like an
 Opposition by raising very recent past, relevant political issues in the light of current developments within
 the financial year that we share, he would have wailed and he would have caterwauled in despair to hear
 the Hon. the Leader of the Opposition, when he was Chief Minister, argue at length in his four replies,
 1225 while I was a Member of the Opposition, that it was *relevant* to go as far back as 1988 and blame the
 GSLP for what happened in 2008, 2009, 2010 and 2011!

In his reply, the Hon. the Leader of the Opposition, when he was Chief Minister in 2011, went back to
 1988 – but he was not the only Member of the Opposition who did so, Mr Speaker! If we go back to the
 contributions of the hon. Gentleman and Lady opposite, when they were in Government: for example, the
 Hon. Mr Netto mentioned 1988 seven times in 2011. Isn’t *that* going back to the past, Mr Figueras?

1230 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Well done, well spotted!

Hon. N F Costa: Mr Clive Beltran, who was the chief ‘rent a goon’ and main ‘clapper’ in support of
 1235 the Hon. the Leader of the Opposition also mentioned 1988 twice. Yvette del Agua also mentions it on a
 couple of occasions. This is in 2011. They mention 1988 – but we cannot mention 2011, when we share
 the same financial year! *Give us a break, Mr Speaker!* (**Several Members:** Hear, hear!) (*Applause*)

Hon. Chief Minister: *A tour de force*, thus!

1240 **Hon. N F Costa:** Political considerations aside, Mr Speaker, I turn, firstly, to the Gibraltar Port
 Authority. More will come politically, Mr Speaker, but I would like to concentrate on my responsibilities,
 for a little while at least!

Mr Speaker, it is the view of the Government that the time has certainly come to consolidate the port
 operation by investing in the infrastructure and equipment with a programme of capital expenditure that
 1245 has suffered lack of investment for many years. The new Captain of the Port, Roy Stanbrook, joined at
 the end of February and I endeavour to meet him weekly to develop an ongoing strategy to maintain and
 grow the port business, while safeguarding the infrastructure and our environment. In order to maintain
 and improve the commercial viability and safety of the Port of Gibraltar, investment in infrastructure and
 personnel is clearly essential.

1250 It is to be noted, Mr Speaker, that the systematic under-investment that I have just highlighted has
 surfaced unfortunately in recent security and insurance audits that have exposed some quite painful

shortcomings, which this Government is ensuring the Gibraltar Port Authority addresses. At the same time, Mr Speaker, continuing and ongoing audits of infrastructure and systems have exposed vulnerabilities in business critical systems. A project to identify such issues and build resilience into the port operation is currently underway and I look forward to receiving the recommendations of the GPA.

1255

Further, Mr Speaker, the security of our port and the safety of its users remain paramount and therefore the continued investment in an integrated closed circuit television system, with wide area surveillance of all areas of the port, is considered essential. The system, which augments the CCTV, which is already installed, will be fitted within a few weeks.

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Mr Speaker, it is clear to everyone – although clearly it was patently obvious that successive GSD Port Ministers were blind to the reality – that the very physical fabric of the port requires continuous maintenance, in order to sustain safe access for vehicles and pedestrians alike. Only on Friday, Mr Speaker, Captain Roy Stanbrook wrote to me, after which I attended the port, as a result of damage to culverts due to the lack of maintenance of the physical port infrastructure.

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As recently announced therefore, Mr Speaker, this Government has embarked on a programme of resurfacing roads and walkways within the port, as well as repairs and refurbishment to the Detached Mole, Mr Speaker, in order to make it safe for all those people who land there, and of course at different times there may be quite a few, including the large numbers of fishing enthusiasts who use the facility for leisure purposes, such as the annual angling competition. In this respect, toilet facilities are already installed and first aid facilities are being provided.

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As this House is also aware, Mr Speaker, modified procedures have now been developed and agreed between the Port and the Gibraltar Federation of Sea Anglers to enable access for resident fishermen to the port when it is safe and practical to do so.

1275

Further still, Mr Speaker, a programme of augmentation and replacement of the Oil Spill Response Programme necessary to protect the marine environment is also in progress to ensure that we are always able to meet the challenge, should there be an oil spill. At this juncture, Mr Speaker, I must associate myself with the comments made by the Hon. the Minister for Health and the Environment, Dr. John Cortes, when he, in this House, thanked publicly the staff of both the Gibraltar Port Authority and the Department of the Environment for their impeccable professionalism and unwavering and around the clock dedication in tackling the oil spill, which they successfully contained.

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As a result of the issues encountered during the recent oil spill, a full review, Mr Speaker, of the Oil Spill Contingency Plan, including pollution equipment stock levels together with their suitability for use in the Gibraltar environment will be carried out, with special regard to the changing environmental sensitivities, including protected areas and species. The Captain of the Port in conjunction with the Gibraltar Maritime Administration are putting together recommendations for the Cabinet to consider.

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Mr Speaker, whilst not referring specifically to the circumstances that took place in Gibraltar on making this particular comment, it did become clear to myself and to the Hon. the Minister for the Environment, that there is a lack of sufficient criminal penalties for pollution offences and therefore a complete absence of criminal and effective deterrence. Whereas the Government recognises and supports the importance of bunkering to Gibraltar's economy, it must also be equally conscious of its environmental responsibilities and Gibraltar must send a strong unequivocal and clear message that it will not accept criminally irresponsible operators. A proposed change to Port Rules will therefore bring the criminal penalties in Gibraltar in line with those in the United Kingdom for pollution offences, effectively increasing the maximum penalty from £2,000 to £250,000, Mr Speaker – (*Applause*) not just a [*inaudible*] environmental filter, but in fact a real one.

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As the port launches become older, they are becoming more expensive to maintain. As a result, the work of specifying the requirements for a new port launch is also underway.

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As with all of my areas of responsibility, work continues to engage with stakeholders of the port. The Gibraltar Port Operators' Association, the Bunker Forum and engagement with leisure interests are all examples of the strategy of engagement being pursued.

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It is also important to note, Mr Speaker, in particular to the Hon. Mr Figueras, that senior officials of the GPA and the Department of the Environment meet and liaise regularly with the Environmental Safety Group and any other persons wishing to come to discuss any concerns with them, to discuss environmental issues relating to port related operations.

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As the House is also aware, a project is underway to provide a sufficient number of berths to accommodate the boats of all boat owners – the long, long suffering boat owners as you say, Mr Speaker – as well as those currently on the waiting list. Detailed investigations have commenced and an inter-ministerial committee is driving this project forward.

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The port building Mr Speaker, has also suffered a lack of structured investment over the years, resulting in accommodation which is barely fit for the purpose of running a 21st-century port. Work is therefore underway to specify the requirements for a new port building.

Mr Speaker, I now turn to the Gibraltar Maritime Administration. It is well known that the general down turn in the world economy has had an impact on both the volume and value of the maritime trade.

1315 The fallout from this has been that some companies have ceased trading, but we are happy to say, Mr Speaker, that in many cases the vessels have not been sold on to other companies and, in the main, continue to operate under the Gibraltar flag.

Overall though, the number of ships on the Gibraltar Ship Register has fallen by 3% from 316 to 306, but there was an increase in overall gross tonnage from 2.12 million in April 2011 to 2.37 million in April 1320 2012, and the mean average age of the fleet fell from 11 to 9 years. This means the fleet is getting younger and the change of the fleet size is towards larger ships. The reduction in the age of the fleet also indicates, Mr Speaker, the confidence the owners place in these new and larger ships on the Gibraltar register in these difficult trading conditions.

The difficult trading conditions, Mr Speaker, that I have mentioned that have affected the international community, have required careful management of both the technical and administrative resources available to the GMA. The resignation of some surveyors, Mr Speaker, and the significant delay in replacing those surveyors in 2011 resulted in some changes to the way audits and surveys had to be carried out. Whilst more tasks have had to be delegated to the classification society, increased monitoring of these organisations was introduced to ensure the overall quality of the fleet did not decline. The owners and operators of ships which were not performing to the standards expected of Gibraltar registered ships 1330 were monitored, and in two instances, the ships were removed from the register.

Mr Speaker, it is to maintain the position of the GMA and to increase the size of the Gibraltar fleet at a time when under the GSD it started to dip, I approved two targeted promotional visits with local representatives, this year. For the first time, Mr Speaker, a visit was made to Norway to meet both existing owners and possible new owners. The existing owners expressed their satisfaction of the service provided by the GMA and there have been several enquiries from companies that did not have ships registered in Gibraltar. 1335

Following the yearly visit to Germany to meet existing clients and possible new ones, the GMA were invited by the German Ship Owners, along with six other EU flags, to a two-day seminar during Easter week. This allowed, Mr Speaker, the GMA to make two major presentations and, more importantly, Mr Speaker, meet many ship owners and operators on a face-to-face basis. 1340

The visit, Mr Speaker, is pursuant to this Government's policy philosophy of establishing continuous personal contacts to attract investment to and in Gibraltar, and although it is still early days, several new German companies have transferred new, much larger ships, to the GMA. The schedule over the next 12 months, Mr Speaker, indicates up to 35 new ships, totalling over 700,000 gross tonnes will be registered with the GMA. 1345

The latter, Mr Speaker – barely little time of being in office – represents a 30% increase in the size of the fleet and many of these ships are larger units of over 50,000 gross tonnes. Already a schedule of changes of flag is arranged, stretching into 2013. This has meant much more work for the GMA, Mr Speaker, as inevitably all new business that comes to Gibraltar will entail. But to facilitate this schedule, and to improve the service to the clients, and also a first, a surveyor has been stationed in Hamburg; another surveyor is now in Hong Kong, who already undertake work on behalf of the GMA. 1350

Mr Speaker, it is also to be noted that the Seafarers' section issued nearly 2,000 Endorsements to Officers serving on Gibraltar-registered ships. This is an important aspect of maintaining the safety and maritime protection standards expected on board the ships of the fleet. The Provisional Endorsements, which are issued on line, is normally completed within 24 hours. The stated service standard for the full term Endorsement is two to three weeks but it is usually completed, Mr Speaker, within eight days for online applications, which is an additional service introduced just a few months ago, Mr Speaker, and has been very welcomed by our customers worldwide. 1355

Further still, Mr Speaker, the Gibraltar Yacht Registry is now an integral part of the GMA and during the year the number of yachts on the register has continued to increase and the drive to enter the Mega Yacht market has continued, but this is, at the moment, a difficult market to gain an initial toe-hold. Discussions with other interested parties were held during the year and in this connection, I had great pleasure in opening the first Gibraltar Yacht Seminar in Ocean Village. At the seminar, the GMA issued an open invitation to all parties interested in the area of the maritime world to a meeting, to take place this 1360 month, to discuss how best to market Gibraltar.

In this respect, Mr Speaker, and to further facilitate and improve the services of the Gibraltar Yacht Registry, I promulgated two Legal Notices: numbers 30 and 41 of this year. The first of these, Mr Speaker – the Location of the Office of the Registrar of Pleasure Yachts – formally recorded the move of the GYR into the GMA premises. The second – the Gibraltar Merchant Shipping (Pleasure Yachts) Regulations – provides that the Marine Administrator may impose conditions for registration on pleasure yachts of 24 metres or over intended to be used for charter. This amendment, Mr Speaker, enables the registration now in Gibraltar of the commonly called super-yachts for the first time. 1370

The House will also have taken due note of the Budget measures announced by the Hon. the Chief Minister yesterday, to stimulate the use of 'super-yacht' vessels by reclassifying these and therefore not

1375 subjecting them to any import duty; and reducing import duty on vessels under 18 metres of length from 12% to 6%.

Mr Speaker, following on from my responsibilities for the Port and the Gibraltar Maritime Administration, it makes sense to discuss the cruising industry, as a port related and maritime operation.

1380 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Mr Speaker, if I may, with the leave of the House, ask the Minister to pause there, so that we might adjourn, for those of us who wish to attend the tribute in the Supreme Court, until 12.30 – I think that is convenient.

1385 **Mr Speaker:** Is that convenient to hon. Members? This House will adjourn until 12.30.

The House adjourned at 11.47 a.m. and resumed its sitting at 12.30 p.m.

1390 **Appropriation Act 2012**
Debate continued

Hon. N F Costa: Mr Speaker, with your permission, I will continue with the cruise industry.

1395 Mr Speaker, the entire House no doubt appreciates the indisputable importance of the cruising industry to the economy of Gibraltar. Everyone will agree, Mr Speaker, of the vitally critical economic activity generated by cruise lines and cruise passengers disembarking at Gibraltar's port. The relevance of cruising, Mr Speaker, is not simply limited to the direct expenditure in retail, as important as that is, but also to the other services that Gibraltar operators can offer, such as bunkers and the whole gamut of chandlery and other maritime services.

1400 It is against this backdrop, Mr Speaker, that we find that, in 2011, Gibraltar received 186 calls, in comparison to the 238 calls in 2009 and 174 calls in 2010, with 303,759 passengers. This year, Mr Speaker, the figure is anticipated to dip again slightly from 2011, with 177 calls currently booked, with an anticipated drop in passenger figures to approximately 305,000. It is against these facts, Mr Speaker, that this House and the whole of Gibraltar have had to endure to date the hard faced comments by the Hon.

1405 Mr Bossino that we are to follow the so-called 'success story' of the GSD' on tourism.
Mr Speaker, one really has to have, for the reasons that I will now further illustrate, *la cara dura* – and there really is no English equivalent to this fantastic Spanish expression – to have done nothing to recover the position in the drop in calls from 2009 and yet pretend that things are on the up and up and, to top the hypocrisy, thanks to them.

1410 Mr Speaker, let me elucidate, mainly for the benefit of the hon. Gentleman opposite and his contributions in this House, that the figure of cruise calls for 2012 has gone up by seven from what we inherited in December 2011, as a result of this Government's philosophy of pursuing personal contacts and structuring continuous and fluid communication with the decision makers in the cruise industry.

1415 Mr Speaker, you would think that sirens and alarm bells would have gone off in my predecessor's office, when cruise calls went down in 2010 from 2009 by no less than 64 calls, Mr Speaker, 64 calls and the response from the GSD Administration at the time was to do nothing, other than to continue to spend tens of thousands of pounds on a stand, once a year, that the figures clearly showed actually translated in a loss of business to Gibraltar. We were led to believe, Mr Speaker, that Gibraltar had never been better! It is indeed a testament to the wisdom of Gibraltarians that they knew that it was time *not* 'to keep trusting', (**A Member:** Hear, hear.) to borrow yet another of the most politically misconceived slogans in Gibraltar's modern political history. Is that not, Mr Speaker, the 'big lie' that the Leader of the Opposition referred to?

1425 Political considerations aside, Mr Speaker, and when we look at the reality and the facts of cruising, we must consider the infrastructure currently and presently enjoyed in Gibraltar which is, firstly, the Western Arm, which, the House is aware, is a major entry point for visitors to Gibraltar. Including crew – not just passengers – an estimated half a million people arrived last year by cruise ship. In the 16 years of its operation, following a decision by the last GSLP Administration to convert a warehouse into the Cruise Terminal, the facility has successfully handled over 2.5 million passengers.

1430 As the House is aware, Mr Speaker, and as a result of the initiative of the Government, the derelict Ice Box Building has now been demolished and remedial re-surfacing works are currently underway, while the whole area is being spruced up, including tiling of an important area where visitors regularly frequent. Further, Mr Speaker, the Government is considering a number of infrastructural options on how best to develop our cruising facilities.

1435 And indeed, Mr Speaker, in following what I am sure now the Leader of the Opposition would agree was an unfortunate attack to take in talking about the 'big lie', one is forced to wonder why, if cruise passenger arrivals are so much higher than visitors by air, the previous Government did not strategise on

how to maximise the potential for cruises, rather than spend 74 million euros – and rising – on an unnecessarily extravagant and politically driven, air terminal.

1440 As the House knows Mr Speaker, in March I visited for two days, prior to what is known as a Seatrade Cruise Convention. Meetings were held with executives of Royal Caribbean, Azamara Club Cruises, Prestige Cruise Holdings – which owns both Regent Seven Seas Cruises and Oceania Cruises, and Silversea Cruises. I also met Giora Israel, the Senior Vice President, Global Port Development, for Carnival Corporation, which owns 10 cruise lines, including P&O, Costa, Cunard and Holland American Line.

1445 And of course, Mr Speaker, the purpose of all of these meetings is precisely that: to establish the personal line of communication between the Gibraltar Government and the Gibraltar Tourist Board and the senior executives whose companies account for the greater part of our cruise business. So the House is aware, Mr Speaker, in 2013, vessels owned by Carnival Corporation alone – the Senior Vice President of which I met – will account for 45% of the anticipated total of calls here and 55% of the expected number of passengers. I was able to brief Carnival, Mr Speaker, on the Government's policies in respect of tourism and the port, as well as on other matters of mutual interest. It therefore gives me great personal satisfaction to note, Mr Speaker, in this House, that we will shortly be receiving Mr Israel to Gibraltar to progress further various cruise-related issues. It should be noted, Mr Speaker, that the visit of Mr Israel is even more importing when one considers the international backdrop and in particular, the social unrest in a number of Mediterranean countries, including Greece and Syria, which has dampened the demand for cruises in the region by North Americans and therefore highlighting the need to have this personal contact with persons that decide where their ships call.

1455 In addition to this, Mr Speaker, the Government will now endeavour to hold quarterly meetings with cruise lines in the UK. Unlike the previous Administration, who clearly did not undertake the efforts to establish personal contacts, the Government has instigated contacts with all major cruise lines in the UK. The initiative will hopefully remedy the significant decrease in calls Gibraltar suffered since 2009, very much to the detriment of our Main Street traders and tourism operators in general. The first of these quarterly meetings, Mr Speaker, was held last week in the United Kingdom. I met with eight of the major cruise line directors and port and itinerary managers, with a view to continue the new Government's marketing drive to attract new cruise business to Gibraltar and to establish closer working relationships with senior cruise line management.

1460 It is important to note, Mr Speaker, that these cruise lines all cater to the British market, which is the largest source market for cruise passengers in Europe, with 1.7 million residents purchasing cruises in 2011, which is almost a 5% increase over 2010.

1470 During the course of these meetings, senior management and senior itinerary planning and shore excursion decision makers provided their feedback on Gibraltar. Gibraltar, of course, can use such feedback to its benefit in developing the services and the facilities provided to cruise ships and their passengers. The Government firmly believes that one-to-one meetings with representatives of the industry are the most effective way, Mr Speaker, in which to increase awareness about the products and services Gibraltar has to offer. It is also, Mr Speaker, the best way to advise these top executives of all pertinent tourism and port issues that will affect their decision as to whether or not to call to Gibraltar.

1475 It is clear to us, Mr Speaker, having visited both Miami and the UK, that the drop in calls to Gibraltar are directly due to the complete absence and lack in the past of communication between the Government and the cruise lines.

1480 Mr Speaker, in the light of all that I have said so far, there really cannot be any other reasonable, credible, more cogent explanation, given that calls to Gibraltar have reduced dramatically at a time when Europeans are booking more cruises than ever. In 2011, Mr Speaker, there was an increase in 9% of European residents booking cruises and yet a drop in calls to Gibraltar. The fact, Mr Speaker, that Gibraltar will see the return of the French Pullmantour product, as well as four newly scheduled calls from Azamara the same year we held meetings, is a testament to what personal contacts will achieve.

1485 Another major discussion point with the cruise lines was that of introducing Gibraltar as a possible turnaround port in the future. Incentive packages in this regard were also discussed in major detail. Due to the business relationships we have developed, Gibraltar will now be increasingly used in cruise line publications and catalogues. This will also put Gibraltar in the limelight of cruise passengers.

1490 Amongst all of this, Mr Speaker, one cannot escape the reality that spending by cruise lines on fuel has increased by 157% in the last six years alone. Throughout all of our discussions, therefore, it was made absolutely clear to us by senior executives that the cost of fuel is, and will continue to be, at the heart of the decision-making processes in respect of itineraries. Due to Gibraltar's strategic geographical location and the efficient and competitively priced bunkering services, we are strategically well placed in this respect.

1495 As I have also mentioned in the past, Mr Speaker, these one-to-one meetings are an essential first step in establishing the contacts so that Gibraltar is fresh in the minds of the senior executives. These first meetings mean nothing without follow-ups and therefore, Mr Speaker, we now have institutional

1500 structures that meet regularly to make sure that the various discussion points that are mooted during our meetings are, in fact, followed up regularly.

Mr Speaker, inextricably linked to my duties in the port and cruising is of course tourism.

1505 In this financial year, Mr Speaker, Gibraltar House will continue to be an important part of the Gibraltar Tourist Board's marketing activities. This is because, Mr Speaker, the UK is Gibraltar's principal source market, so most of the marketing and advertising activity will be co-ordinated with Gibraltar House.

It will include attendance at selective major travel industry events, as well as Gibraltar-specific trade and consumer roadshows. The roadshows are organised primarily in cities that are close to the airports that operate flights to Gibraltar. Our plan for this year includes events in north-west England and the Midlands.

1510 In order to increase capacity on existing air routes, we should also look into organised activities in the Heathrow, Gatwick and Luton catchment areas.

One of the Government's initiatives for increasing visitor numbers is the setting-up of events that will attract niche-markets to Gibraltar, Mr Speaker. Gibraltar House is working with the Gibraltar Tourist Board on various projects and we expect to make at least one important announcement during the next few months.

1515 This year, Gibraltar House will continue its active presence on social media through the Gibraltar Tourist Board's Facebook page and Twitter feeds. The number of followers on both media continues to grow. These include industry professionals from travel agencies and tour operators who follow Gibraltar for updates on events in Gibraltar and product improvements. The social media activities will complement the new platforms that we are currently developing and to which I will make reference later in this speech.

1520 This year, Mr Speaker, we will continue with our product briefings for travel agents. This has proved to be a worthwhile initiative, at which our UK sales manager visits travel agencies to train their sales staff on Gibraltar as a holiday destination. The close co-operation between the Gibraltar Tourist Board in Gibraltar and Gibraltar House will continue, through a series of weekly meetings, so as to ensure that the momentum of our marketing campaign and our new initiatives is not lost.

1525 Mr Speaker, on becoming Minister for Tourism, professionals in every single operator with whom I have met, without one single exception, have noted to me their disappointment with the lack of understanding of the previous Administration in relation to this vital economic activity. This is not me saying so, Mr Speaker, but professionals of tourism and these comments are recorded for posterity in the minutes of meetings, some of which – I must deliciously confess, having gladly commented to the hon. Gentleman opposite – in reply to an answer to one of his questions. It is in relation to tourism, Mr Speaker that the hon. Gentleman opposite has made some of his most remarkable statements which I shall refer to shortly.

1530 It is in order, Mr Speaker, that the Gibraltar public can separate the previous Administration's words, and to copy the hon. Lady's statements about 'grand statements' and 'spin', let me tell the Gentleman and the Lady opposite what 'spin' truly is, certainly in relation to the areas of tourism, because this Budget will immediately show the importance that we as a Government attach to tourism, and the lack of importance, despite the grand statements that the hon. Lady referred to previously, showed in their lack of investment in Tourism.

1535 The Government, Mr Speaker, will begin, with this Budget, real and much needed investment in the product and in the first instance to the existing visitor attractions. These sites will, in the short-term, be refurbished to bring desperately crucial and long overdue improvements and will be followed by a longer-term policy to create a truly memorable visitor experience, Mr Speaker, because the aim of the long-term plan has to be that when a visitor visits Gibraltar, be it a leisure visitor, or a business tourist, that they will want to come to Gibraltar again. It is not good enough to simply feed people into Gibraltar, spend money here and then go. We want to recapture people and want people to come back. That is where the long-term policy of this Government is going, Mr Speaker.

1540 As the House knows, the Government is engaged in an intense consultation process with the industry, through the GTB, to make important changes to what should be one of the most important revenue generators to our economy. Government, Mr Speaker, would like to see greater investment and participation of the private sector in the development of tourism. It is in order to encourage our private operators to invest in their own product with confidence and to show them that this Government wants to fully realise and unlock the potential of our tourism sector, that this Government will initiate that much-needed investment programme on the tourist sites and the visitor attractions, which will represent in one Budget a quantitative and qualitative leap in investment.

1545 Mr Speaker, the substantial figure of £1 million has been allocated in this financial year alone for this task. This allocation, Mr Speaker, is more than the previous Government allocated in total in the last five financial years. I say 'allocated', because even though it was allocated, it was not necessarily spent, so if

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1560 we went on money actually spent, it was even less.

The allocated funds are scheduled to be spent this financial year Mr Speaker, on various projects which will include the provision, firstly, of absolutely needed new toilets at various locations, the refurbishment of existing facilities, improvements to St Michael's Cave and the Great Siege Tunnels and other works.

1565 As a Government, Mr Speaker, we have identified improvements we would like to carry out within the financial year. We are already involved in receiving feedback from current stakeholders and we will be inviting representations from the general public, as I have asked them today, and in particular, from the Tourism Advisory Council, on which projects should be prioritised. The Government would ideally like to issue tender notices for these projects to be issued in the next six to eight weeks, to make sure that we start work straight away, Mr Speaker.

1570 The Government will invest on some infrastructure works at the beaches for the next season. What we will not do, Mr Speaker, is to spend almost a million pounds of taxpayers' money in replenishment of sand at beaches without structures that prevent the sand from disappearing a few months later! It is only in the fanciful world of the GSD, Mr Speaker, that an Administration just before Election time, decides 'Well, let's throw away money', with an absolute cavalier disregard to taxpayers' money and how hard it is to earn, patently for electoral considerations, without an iota of forward planning – yes, an absence of forward planning because Mr Speaker, you do not need to have a GCSE or a rudimentary understanding of engineering that if you need to replenish sand on a beach, it is because the wave action is taking it away, so you had better make really sure that there are structures in place, so that the sand is not washed away.

1575 But no, Mr Speaker, £900,000 later, sand in, sand out. Thank you, GSD – Gibraltar has never been better! (*Laughter*)

1580 Mr Speaker, in any case, this year the GTB embarked on a full programme of works to the beaches, as I outlined in the last Question Time of this House, with the additional innovations. Examples of such innovations include weekly cleaning of all beaches from 1st February; laying of walkways at all beaches from mid-May; the purchase of new lifeguard boats; and the employment of senior lifeguards.

1585 Further, Mr Speaker, it does give me great pleasure to announce in this House that the Government has focused on restoring a full complement to the GTB and has restructured the team to enhance the responsive approach of the Board in attracting visitors to Gibraltar. The Government has restructured the management team to offer an effective and timely implementation of Government policies and business opportunities.

1590 This brings me, Mr Speaker, to the importance of effectively marketing Gibraltar in a cost-effective manner and one where we measure the success or otherwise of the strategy by results and not by fancy spun articles or fancy words.

1595 Mr Speaker, with the GTB, the Government has set out to create personal relationships with key decision makers in the tourism industry. This framework ensures that these individuals are always fully aware of the opportunities available to them and their companies or organisations in Gibraltar. In this way, the Government actively seeks inward investment in the tourism industry and gives the sector the importance it deserves.

1600 And, as the House will know, the GTB is engaged in developing a new interactive web platform that will work more effectively in marketing Gibraltar in a modern, vibrant and dynamic way – the full details of which, Mr Speaker, will be announced within this calendar year.

1605 Undoubtedly, the internet has changed the way in which tourism destinations sell and promote their products. The Government will improve and enhance the online tools available to promote Gibraltar and use this channel to keep the tourism industry abreast of all that is happening. In furtherance of employing new marketing tools, the Government will introduce Wi-Fi hotspots at the most important locations visited by tourists. These will enable the independent visitor and indeed all others, to download applications that are available about Gibraltar and to browse the internet for information.

1610 Further, two applications on Gibraltar have recently been launched which are very useful tools for the independent visitor to use when planning a visit to Gibraltar and as a guide when they are here. These are private sector initiatives, Mr Speaker, which we very much welcome and my Ministry is encouraging and which the GTB is providing advice on content.

1615 Pursuant to our manifesto commitment of marketing in an intelligent, targeted and cost-effective manner, the Government will review the levels of attendance at trade fairs and exhibitions and will decide whether or not to continue to participate in some of these events and, if so, which ones. Even if we do attend conferences, though, Mr Speaker, our participation must be much more focused and results driven. By creating activities and opportunities for the industry partners and visitors to the exhibitions, we will make these events work harder for Gibraltar. This year, Mr Speaker, will be the first time I attend the World Travel Market and like with the Miami Cruise Convention, we will investigate to determine whether such an event does offer value for money. It is essential that more focus is given to driving niche market tourism and developing the products and services for this sector.

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1625 Gibraltar's history, heritage and natural assets are an advantage when trying to place the Rock among its competitors in this market. Event-led tourism, Mr Speaker, is becoming more important with tourists now looking for reasons for which to travel to a destination. The Chess Festival in Gibraltar is a perfect example and the Government will work to attract similar events to Gibraltar.

1630 In co-operation with my colleagues at the Ministry of Culture, the Government has already set up events such as what can undoubtedly be described, Mr Speaker, as the excellent Gibraltar Jazz Festival and we work hard to promote this and other events, which we hope will become annual events targeted during seasons where hotel occupancy is low.

1635 The GTB, in co-operation with the tourism industry partners, will actively pursue the meetings and incentive market. Mr Speaker, Gibraltar currently has facilities and services for the small to medium-sized meeting and conference market and we will explore more opportunities in this field. With a range of unique products, the Rock can also place itself firmly in the incentive travel sector.

1640 And it is, Mr Speaker, in a bid to open up tourism markets, that the Government has set up a visa waiver scheme that will enable Gibraltar based tour operators to offer day trip excursions to non-EU nationals, commencing with Russian and Chinese tourists, as part of an organised tour. The Gibraltar based tour operators will have to adhere to certain conditions set out by the Borders and Coastguard Agency, which will ensure the repatriation of any visitors, if this becomes necessary.

1645 I turn now, Mr Speaker, to the airlines. As we have seen recently, the airline industry has had its share of turmoil, in what is, in any case, Mr Speaker, an inherently and habitually changeable industry. These changes have affected Gibraltar. We have seen easyJet take a commercial decision to discontinue services from Liverpool to Gibraltar and the cessation of services by bmibaby from East Midlands Airport, due to the takeover of the parent company.

1650 Mr Speaker, at this juncture, I find that I must pause to make a special reference to my hon. Friend, Mr Bossino's statements in respect of BMI services. The House will recall – I certainly do, as does the public – that Mr Bossino saw fit to issue a press statement to say that the bmibaby service was and I quote: 'secured by the GSD Government'.

1655 The Hon. Mr Bossino goes on to describe this as and I quote:

'an unprecedented success story of the aviation industry under the previous administration.'

1655 Mr Bossino issued this statement, Mr Speaker, after I had expressly told him in this House that the Government had never said, nor would it ever say, that we had secured the bmibaby service, because it would be – and I quote myself – 'a patent falsehood'.

The hon. Gentleman further says that the GSD caused this jamboree of extra flights, notwithstanding the incontrovertible reality that for the majority of the time under the GSD, there were, in fact, less air links to and from Gibraltar than there had been in 1996.

1660 Mr Speaker, why let facts and figures get in the way of transparently self-serving statements?

1665 The press release is even more unfortunate for the hon. Gentleman opposite, given that the Hon. Mr Bossino clearly forgot the costly fiascos of the GSD, to include the Regional Air Lines flight to Casablanca and, more recently, Andalus Airlines. The press statement, Mr Speaker, is further spectacularly unmeritorious in disingenuously attempting to justify the expenditure of 74 million euros – and rising – by the addition of bmibaby. Mr Speaker, one would be moved to laughter at the callow, baseless and politically self-serving statements, if it were not quite so serious that a Government project should overrun by 50 million euros and rising.

1670 In any case, Mr Speaker, the Hon. Mr Bossino says all of this on Tuesday, 10th April and on Friday, 13th April – very unlucky for some, Mr Speaker – the press reports the takeover of bmibaby, a story, Mr Speaker, that all of us who kept quite a close eye on this company unfortunately knew may well happen. This made the statements by the Hon. Mr Bossino even more surprising.

1675 You would think that, even if he did not know then, at that point, Mr Speaker, Mr Bossino would cease the pointless vindication that it was the GSD that clinched the deal with BMI. No, Mr Speaker, because let's remember that no-one here had said that we had brought bmibaby, but he still felt that a second press statement had to be issued, to repeat exactly the same things. And, of course, Mr Speaker, shortly following the second statement to vindicate what had already been said in the first, it is unfortunate that Gibraltar and the world finds out that bmibaby ceases operation to Gibraltar.

Mr Speaker, you could not make these things up!

1680 If I were to adopt the hollow and entirely opportunistic statements of the hon. Gentleman opposite, I would now accuse the administration of not having done their due diligence properly, of not seeking air connectivity with another airlines – but of course, Mr Speaker, I, as politically responsible, will not make those statements and will allow the hon. Gentleman opposite to continue to play party politics, whilst we work very hard for the people of Gibraltar. (**Several Members:** Hear hear!) (*Applause*) After all, Mr Speaker, who am I to submit the hon. Gentleman opposite into sanity and common sense?

1685 Indeed, Mr Speaker, I am delighted to report that it is directly as a result of our hands-on, working round the clock philosophy that we were not only able to secure that services from the north-west of the UK have been sustained by Monarch Airlines, boosting capacity from Manchester, in the shortest period of time, Mr Speaker, but that connections from the Midlands will not be lost, as today, Mr Speaker, I can today confirm that Monarch Airlines will operate from this region as announced, as from next summer, and we expect the airline to make a statement on this shortly.

1690 Services from Heathrow, Gatwick and Luton continue all year round providing capacity to the south-east of the United Kingdom. We continue, Mr Speaker, at every possible meeting, to push for increased capacity on routes from the UK and for more regional services from the UK, and I am confident that these will materialise.

1695 We are also pursuing the possibility of connections from other destinations in Europe. Airline planning, I am told, Mr Speaker, happens several seasons in advance – notwithstanding what I have just said that this Government was able to actually obtain additional services in record time – and decisions and announcements on the start of new routes do take some time to come forward.

1700 Among other initiatives this Government has taken is the setting up of inter-ministerial meetings to promote a co-ordinated approach to heritage, culture, tourism and environmental matters, including the Upper Rock. The Government attaches a high level of importance to these matters, which it believes are inextricably linked. This is part of the Government’s manifesto commitment to conduct certain important projects through inter-ministerial committees.

1705 Also, Mr Speaker, I have set up an expanded Tourism Advisory Council. The Council has now met on two occasions this year, on 11th April and 31st May, and will also be meeting again this month. By far, Mr Speaker, the most consistent theme in respect of feedback from the Council has been the need to stop talking about it and to actually really invest in Gibraltar’s tourism product and the sites, and embrace on-line marketing tools. It is because, Mr Speaker, that we do actually listen and action what our professionals and the people on the ground tell us, that we have done precisely that in this, our first Budget.

1710 Mr Speaker, I now turn to another of my Ministerial responsibilities, which is Commercial Affairs.

1715 In line with yet another manifesto commitment, I have been appointed as Minister with responsibility for small businesses. The first order of business, Mr Speaker, was therefore to establish effective communication with businesses to encourage entrepreneurship. To nurture this, Mr Speaker, a Small Business Board that I chair has been set up and, like the Tourism Advisory Council, we meet regularly. It has been set, Mr Speaker, to help and foster development and continually review the needs of small businesses. But much more important focus than that, Mr Speaker, is the opportunity for the Small Business Board to actually make recommendations that I can then put to the Government for the Cabinet to consider and report back to them, so that main street traders and people with a vested interest in business can actually have a direct door to Government.

1720 In addition to this, Mr Speaker, a Business Support Unit has been set up within my Ministry and the aim of the Unit is to offer help and advice to businesses that have either relocated to Gibraltar or have already set up in Gibraltar but require nurturing. The unit is currently being resourced and should be operating in the very near future.

1725 Further, Mr Speaker, it is clear now that a complete review and overhaul is necessary and is currently underway in respect of consumer related legislation. This is in response to calls from both the Chamber of Commerce and the Gibraltar Federation of Small Businesses (GFSB), that current legislation, in particular the Trade Licensing Act, should be reviewed. It is my intention, once this review is completed, Mr Speaker and subject to the recommendations received, to establish an Office of Fair Trading that will encompass the existing consumer protection. The aim is to protect consumers from traders which are unscrupulous and it is anticipated that the legislative framework will be ready to be presented to Parliament within one calendar year.

1730 In the interim, whilst this review is underway, computerisation of the procedures of the Trade Licensing Authority will commence shortly. It is the intention to make the whole process more user-friendly.

1735 Further, Mr Speaker; I am delighted to announce in this House that a Bill is now ready to provide for two additional members of the Trade Licensing Authority, whilst the review is undertaken, to be appointed after consulting the Gibraltar Federation of Small Businesses. This, Mr Speaker, corrects a historical discrepancy and rightly recognises the rightful place of the GFSB as a vital umbrella organisation for small and medium-sized enterprises.

1740 I now turn, Mr Speaker, to another responsibility which affects all of us, which is transport. Indeed, Mr Speaker, I am happy to note that the Government continues to meet its manifesto commitments in the transport sector, very much it would appear, to the utter dismay of the Hon. Mr Figueras, given yesterday’s Budget contribution.

Within weeks, Mr Speaker – and I am delighted to be able to tell the Hon. Mr Bossino this – a route was put in place to take passengers from Market Place to Both Worlds. This was to meet the self-evident

1745 demand of a sector of our community, those that live in the area and especially the elderly resident of Both Worlds, who did not have adequate public transport and had been neglected by the previous Administration. This is not to mention, Mr Speaker, the fact that it was also the GSD that removed parking for residents.

1750 You see, Mr Speaker, how we can justifiably highlight the shortcomings of the previous Administration and show that we govern at the same time. How we can criticise and govern simultaneously? I know that the Hon. Mr Bossino, will take particular delight when I tell him that the route has been operating now very successfully, since we instituted it two weeks after being elected.

1755 But Mr Speaker, in what has become the hon. Gentleman's opposite characteristic political opportunism, he issues no less than two press releases to criticise the start of the bus route – all of this, Mr Speaker, whilst there were letters from residents of Both Worlds – long-suffering residents of Both Worlds – without transport to their place of residence, writing letters to the press thanking the Government for correcting the unfair situation created by the GSD.

1760 Mr Speaker, even the former Director of the Gibraltar Bus Company, in an extensive interview to the Panorama acknowledges the benefit of the route! Never in the modern history of Gibraltar has a newly elected MP been mentioned in so many letters, in such a short space of time for its position on a question of policy.

1765 Another manifesto commitment that has also been met is the revision of the 'club card' system that had been established by the previous Administration. As from 1st May of this year, Mr Speaker, bus transport has been free, on routes 1 to 4, only for residents of Gibraltar and those holding Gibraltar ID cards and other approved identification documents. These include of course, MoD personnel posted in Gibraltar and their registered dependants.

1770 And much, it did appear at the time, to the chagrin of the Hon. Mr Bossino – but then, Mr Speaker, we are used in this side of the House to the Hon. Mr Bossino complain about everything; he has to say something at Question Time! – cross-frontier workers will also be entitled to free bus travel on production of proof that they have a valid contract of employment and that they are up to date with their taxes. As previously noted, Mr Speaker, this system has the beauty of ensuring compliance with the employment laws and that taxes and social insurance are paid.

1775 Like the truly responsive Government that we are, Mr Speaker, the Government constantly monitors the routes that are operated and facilities provided, to ensure that they meet the demands of the bus users. Only recently, a new request bus stop has been introduced at the junction of Prince Edward's Road with Castle Road and Flat Bastion Road to service the Upper Town. In addition, and after listening to the concerns of the neighbours, a bus shelter has been scheduled to be erected at the top of Tank Ramp.

1780 Further, Mr Speaker, as the House will know, the large buses that are operated by the Gibraltar Bus Company are now around nine years old and are powered by old technology engines that are not as efficient as those being produced now. In fact, the cost of maintaining these buses is now running at approximately £30,000 per month and has cost the taxpayer, since 2005, around £1.5 million. The spending of continually repairing the old bus fleet, Mr Speaker, is clearly unsustainable and the Government is committed to reducing the running costs of the Company as much as possible, without of course affecting the valuable service to the community that the Company currently provides.

1785 It is a damning indictment, Mr Speaker that the Gibraltar Bus Company Limited should have cost the taxpayer approximately £2.3 million in one year alone – not 'headlines', Mr Speaker as the Hon. the Leader of the Opposition said in a GBC call-in, but actual and dreadful accounting facts.

1790 The Government is committed to replacing the bus fleet – I am sure that the Hon. Mr Figueras will now be delighted, because he mentioned it yesterday – with environmentally friendly buses that will reduce emissions and are more in line with *our* environmental policies, Mr Speaker. In this respect, I am delighted to announce – once again, to Mr Figueras – that the Government has today issued a tender for the bus fleet replacement. I am sure he will now pore and read the wonderful things that are stated therein, Mr Speaker.

1795 But I will tell him now anyway: as part of its sustainable development and Euro 2020 objectives, we are inviting tenders for the supply of midi-sized eco-friendly buses. The successful tenderer will be responsible for the delivery of 18 to 20 eco-friendly buses. Very importantly, Mr Speaker, the successful tenderer will also be responsible for the training of the staff at the Gibraltar Bus Company Limited and any other staff associated with the operation and maintenance of the buses and would further be expected, crucially, given the figures I have just announced, provide an after-sales supply of spares for repairs, maintenance, and servicing of the vehicles.

1800 The Government is seeking to procure high quality, competitively priced, low carbon emitting vehicles capable of journeying the existing and any future routes, except for those routes serviced by the mini-sized buses servicing the upper town area, whilst complying with all relevant Gibraltar and EU laws governing traffic and transport issues.

1805 Mr Speaker, our commitments in transport do not stop there. I will carry on for the benefit of Mr Figueras.

1810 I am also delighted to announce today, changes to the current routes operated by the Gibraltar Bus Company, all of this in seven months, Mr Speaker, and he thought we had done very little. This has been done in consultation with the public and taking into account the many complaints and representations that have been received, the new routes have been designed in an effort to improve the service that is currently being offered and to meet the complaints received.

1815 I must further point out, Mr Speaker, that the new routes are not set in stone. We will constantly be monitoring them and if the public have any comments, they can, as they have done over the last seven months, either come to meet me personally or write to me by e-mail.

In the first place, Mr Speaker, I can announce that negotiations have been successfully concluded with the other company that operates Route No. 5, the frontier route, to introduce free bus travel for pensioners on this route. This meets, Mr Speaker, another manifesto commitment.

1820 On enabling this private operator at this juncture to exclusively service Route No. 5, the Gibraltar Bus Company Ltd has been able to redeploy the buses currently used in that route to improve the service, but in addition, Calypso Transport Limited has agreed to carry all pensioners that are resident in Gibraltar free of charge. It is envisaged that free bus travel for resident old age pensioners in the route will commence on 1st August of this year.

1825 The improvements to which I refer, Mr Speaker, will see an additional bus used on Route 2 to increase the passenger carrying capacity of this route. Route 4 will have its frequency increased by the addition of two extra buses to operate the route. This will mean that although the frequency will still be 20 minutes, the extra buses will provide greater passenger carrying capacity.

1830 Further, Routes 3 and 4 have been revised to offer a more efficient and effective service that should address the concerns by residents of the South District travelling into town and to the hospital. It is also the intention to further improve Route 7, the Mount Alvernia route, by increasing the length of its route and frequency. This is a longer-term project, Mr Speaker, that I am discussing with my hon. Friend the Minister for Social Services and Equality, Miss Sacramento.

1835 All the changes that I have mentioned, Mr Speaker, have already been approved by the Transport Commission and the necessary administrative procedures are currently being carried out to give effect. It is intended that all of these new changes will come into effect by the end of August at the very latest.

Now, of course, the public will be informed of all the changes through the media as usual.

1840 In addition Mr Speaker – there is more for the Hon. Mr Figueras – the Government is also working to introduce a bus tracking system and a pilot scheme is currently working in a test environment. This is a web-based system that will enable users, via their computers, to see the bus routes and the location of any bus on a route on a real-time basis.

1845 Mr Speaker, moving on from buses to taxis, a lot has been said, especially during this Election campaign, about the service of taxi drivers and the need to ensure a fully serviced city service. I am therefore glad to advise this House, Mr Speaker, they are more than just words or threats by the Hon. the Leader of the Opposition in the last General Election campaign; I am in fact meeting regularly and working with the Gibraltar Taxi Association to improve the service available to the community as a whole.

1850 With this in mind, Mr Speaker, the Government is assisting the GTA with the replacement of its current infrastructure, including taxi meters. The new system will include GPS technology incorporated into the taxi meter which will enable the nearest taxi to be dispatched after a telephone request. This will ensure that response times are shorter and the service maximised and improved.

1855 The GTA, Mr Speaker, is firmly committed with the Government, to improve the city service that is being provided to ensure that we have a public transport service that the whole of Gibraltar can be proud of. Plans are being finalised to deploy Transport Inspectors, and the role of the Transport Inspector, Mr Speaker, will be to ensure that all public transport operators, buses, taxis, coaches, all of them deliver a service that is up to standard and meets the expectations of the general public. The officers will be appointed under the Transport Act and will have, amongst other powers, the ability to issue on-the-spot fines to public transport operators who do not comply with the law.

1860 I now turn, Mr Speaker, to one of those ‘vision things’ that had, and still have, the habit of going so horribly wrong under the GSD and at which the Hon. Mr Figueras will metaphorically ‘tap dance’ – the GibiBikes.

Mr Speaker, whereas I had finished the Budget address earlier this week and I was quite happy with it, after hearing the startling remarks of the hon. Gentleman opposite, I had just to go back to the office and re-write this part of my speech! It just appears Mr Speaker, the hon. Gentleman either did not hear what I told him in answer to a question, or did listen to me but decided to ignore everything that I told him.

1865 But given that he seems to have forgotten what I told him, or had heard what I said and ignored it anyway, and given that he raised the issue again in public, let me remind him what happens, what are the perilous consequences when you use capital money and you rush a project purely and exclusively for electoral purposes – because if the hon. Gentleman opposite is telling me that a programme that starts on

27th November 2011, a few days before the General Election, is not a political gimmick, Mr Speaker, then nothing is! (**Several Members:** Hear, hear!) (*Applause*)

1870 Let me also remind him now, so that he knows that this Government actually cares once money is spent, how we continue to use it. Let me remind him what I told him in answer to Question 352 of this year. At that date, there were five stations down, damaged locks, sparsity of bikes at peak hours; stations out of action and other problems. Stations at City Hall; Orange Bastion; Europort, having to be restarted manually several times during the day because they were breaking down. At the Frontier, of a potential
1875 45 locks available to clients, only 12. Bike availability, from a maximum of 130, 18 are locked, 31 have their anti-tilt tags broken and there are no spares to repair them; 12 require spares to make them roadworthy; 22 are in reserve, but these may have problems with their anti-tilt mechanisms, which leaves 47 bikes available to our client-base of 419.

1880 It seems pretty rushed and desperate to me, Mr Speaker, and this so ballyhooed ‘paradigm shift’, trumpeted by the Hon. Mr Figueras in respect of transport – *à la* GSD, Mr Speaker – can only translate into ‘money is no object, stupid; there’s an Election! Let’s just throw money at the problem.’

1885 Mr Speaker, if the Hon. Mr Figueras were politically honest, and he is telling us that his Government gave importance to transport, then an urban bike renewal scheme would have been phased through a first, second, third or fourth term of office, not a few days before the Election is called. So let him not talk to us, Mr Speaker, of paradigm shifts, when it is this Government that has an environmental filter and has been shown in all policy announcements made today, Mr Speaker.

1890 Therefore, Mr Speaker, by any objective standard, the Government is clearly prioritising investment in the right places – in the Port; in the GMA; in Tourism; in Public Transport and Commercial Affairs – that will maximise the creation opportunities for Gibraltar. Not only that, Mr Speaker, but from the outset, all Members of this Government have been accessible to everyone – to all who have sought to meet with us. Within weeks, we have demolished, Mr Speaker, whether they believe it or not, the veils of secrecy of Government and opened our Parliamentary and Government processes.

1895 The Hon. Mr Figueras clearly does not remember that when I was a Member of the Opposition, I only had maybe two or three chances to question the Government, where he has had *many* opportunities, month after month, only after seven months of Government by this Administration, Mr Speaker.

Moreover, it gives me great pleasure to say that over the last seven months, I have been able to rely on the friendship, the advice and the support, Mr Speaker, of every single one of my Ministerial colleagues and I very much look forward to continue to work together for the benefit of our community.

1900 No longer, Mr Speaker, do Gibraltarians have to endure the consequences of an overly centralised system of Government, where one man kept an iron grip on all projects that Government had to deliver.

I take this opportunity Mr Speaker to thank the staff of the Gibraltar Parliament for their kind attention and their patience.

1905 I take this opportunity, Mr Speaker, to note and to thank you personally for your own conscientious rigour and also patience, in presiding over our sometimes quite heated and tumultuous debates in this House and publicly record, Mr Speaker, my own personal opinion of the unfailing fairness reflected in all of your rulings. I, for one Mr Speaker, learnt a lot on reading your various statements from the Chair, in *Hansard*, in preparation for my various Budget addresses.

1910 I also wish to thank all of my officials in my different areas of responsibility, in my Private Office, the GTB, the GPA, the GMA, the Department of Transport and the officials in the Bus Company, for their tireless hard work and dedication and for enduring my not infrequent requests at all hours with such good cheer and sheer determination to achieve the Government’s goals. It is entirely true to say, Mr Speaker, that it would be impossible to have done so much in so little time without their unflinching support, hard work and determination.

1915 (*Applause*)

Hon. Chief Minister: Mr Speaker, after that political and literary *tour de force*, it is my pleasure to move that the House do now adjourn to 3.30 this afternoon.

1920 **Mr Speaker:** Is that convenient to all the hon. Members?
This House will adjourn until 3.30 p.m. this afternoon.

The House adjourned at 1.21 p.m. and resumed its sitting at 3.30 p.m.