



PROCEEDINGS OF THE GIBRALTAR PARLIAMENT

MORNING SESSION: 11 a.m. – 3.45 p.m.

Gibraltar, Friday, 5th July 2024

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The Gibraltar Parliament

The Parliament met at 11 a.m.

[MADAM SPEAKER: Hon. Judge K Ramage GMH *in the Chair*]

[CLERK TO THE PARLIAMENT: J B Reyes Esq *in attendance*]

Appropriation Bill 2024 — Second Reading — Debate continued

Clerk: Meeting of Parliament, Friday, 5th July 2024.
Second Reading of the Appropriation Bill 2024 continued.

5 **Madam Speaker:** Would the Hon. Chief Minister like to add anything to his reply?

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, yes, of course, because there have been consequential events overnight in the United Kingdom and that is where I must start this morning. For the first time in history, what we have seen, in the context of the results that are now confirmed in respect of the seats allocated to different parties in the Westminster Parliament, is that there will be a socialist government in the United Kingdom, there is a socialist government in Spain and there is a Socialist Liberal Government in Gibraltar. So, for the first time in history since democracy returned to Spain, since we have had democracy in Gibraltar, there is going to be an opportunity for those of us who are of the left to see an ideological line drawn from London through Madrid to Gibraltar. I do not believe this could have come at a more important time. Of course, that impacts these numbers and this debate because it will impact the opportunities to continue to seek to finalise these new treaty arrangements between the United Kingdom and the European Union in relation to Gibraltar.

Keir Starmer will become Prime Minister of the United Kingdom today if, as all predictions indicate, Rishi Sunak, who is Prime Minister, goes to see the King this morning to offer his resignation and the King then offers Mr Starmer the opportunity to form a government. We have to say it in that way because although it is obvious that that is what is going to happen, there are constitutional niceties that require that we say 'if', but it is now as near as damn it clear that that is what is going to happen. I have known Keir Starmer for many years. I was with him in the Cayman Islands on the day that the Twin Towers came down. We were both involved in a symposium on human rights with Ed Fitzgerald at the time, who introduced us. I have since worked professionally and politically with Mr Starmer and I very much look forward to working with Keir Starmer the Prime Minister. I have known Pedro Sanchez also for many years and met him on a number of occasions. So, for the first time, the Chief Minister of Gibraltar is on first-name terms with the Prime Minister of Spain and the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, another hugely important opportunity to try to leverage those friendships, those political alliances, for the benefit of Gibraltar without crossing any red lines. That does not mean that we agree on everything, that we are not going to disagree, that there are not opportunities even for vehement disagreement, of course, but there are now opportunities that have not been there before.

35 I was heartened to hear David Lammy say publicly that which he has expressed directly to us and, in particular, which Stephen Doughty has expressed directly to us, that the Labour Party is

ready in government to move from where Lord Cameron left the negotiation at a political level, although it has continued at a technical level. Mr Lammy shared those views with the Foreign Press Association in London 48 hours ago, talking of what would happen if he became Foreign Secretary, although saying that he was very firmly of the view that if Labour won the election he would be Foreign Secretary because his discussions with Sir Keir had led him to that conclusion. I very much look forward to meeting with Mr Lammy when he becomes Foreign Secretary and continuing the excellent working and human relationship that we have enjoyed with successive Foreign Secretaries, not least David Cameron, whom the Deputy Chief Minister and I have known for many years.

Overnight, I was very pleased to see James Cleverly, who is one of my best friends in the Conservative Party, keep his seat. He has been a very dedicated Member of Parliament for Gibraltar whenever he has had any responsibility – and whenever he has not had political responsibilities, continued to care about Gibraltar and stay in touch with us. He has strong personal bonds with Gibraltar, so I was very pleased to see him keep his seat – a *real* friend.

In 1997, it was all about whether you were up for Portillo. I dare say last night was whether you were up for Rees-Mogg. I am not sorry to see Mr Mogg leave the Commons, because his views in relation to the Government of Gibraltar's policy in relation to the sovereignty of Gibraltar were not views that anybody could reasonably share. They betrayed a misunderstanding of issues relating to the sovereignty of Gibraltar, which put me in mind of the worst aspects of how the Conservative Party had dealt with Gibraltar in the 1980s, something that happily was not the case once the Conservative Party returned to Opposition, supported us through the joint sovereignty debacle, and then in government have been very supportive of us also.

One of the best moments of last night is that a person of Gibraltar heritage has become Member of Parliament for Finchley and Golders Green – Sarah Sackman MP, as she now is. I was delighted to see that she had turned that race around, and it is a testament not just to her own work but also to the work of Keir Starmer in changing the way that the Labour Party had been seen as anti-Semitic, in particular in that constituency, which is heavily Jewish. I think that every Gibraltar will want to celebrate the election of Ms Sackman to the Labour benches, and we shall follow her career with interest from Gibraltar. She enjoys the congratulations of all Members of the Government, and no doubt all Members of the House.

It is important to thank the outgoing Prime Minister and the outgoing Conservative government for their support since 2010 to successive Governments of Gibraltar, the lion's share of that time in our administration. I do that, and I have written this morning to Rishi Sunak as Prime Minister, for he is still Prime Minister, to thank him on his last day in office for his support in his time as Prime Minister and that of his Conservative predecessors since 2010.

As a socialist, I am, of course, delighted, but I am very conscious of the fact that we are in a coalition with the Liberal Party, who are also the great winners of the election overnight in the United Kingdom. They have gone from eight seats to 71 at the latest tally, which really is a remarkable ... I would say comeback, but it is more than just a comeback. This is Liberals going further and getting more seats than ever before since they were in government at the turn of the 20th century.

So, a real sea change in the United Kingdom, which we hope will be good for the United Kingdom ... even Conservative Members of Parliament who are losing their seats, like Robert Buckland, who has elegantly said that he believes that the change will be good for Britain because those coming in are coming in in good faith to make changes which they believe are good for the United Kingdom.

Madam Speaker, that dealt with, and it is important that that be dealt with because this is a consequential change, which –

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Will the hon. Member give way?

Hon. Chief Minister: I assume, Madam Speaker, the hon. Gentleman wants to address the issue of the UK general election, and on that basis I will give way.

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Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Yes, before he launches into his reply proper, I simply wanted to also acknowledge the events overnight, congratulate the Labour Party on their landslide victory, congratulate Keir Starmer on prospectively becoming Prime Minister later today and acknowledge the efforts of the Conservative government in the past in defence of Gibraltar. There have been times, of course, with both Conservative and Labour administrations, where the people in Gibraltar have felt that we have not been defended enough, but now is not the time to dwell on that. I associate myself with the remarks of the Chief Minister on the success of Sarah Sackman, of Gibraltarian descent, in England yesterday, in a London constituency. We hope that this very big majority Labour will ... it augurs well for the people of Gibraltar and that Keir Starmer will be a staunch defender of Gibraltar, our rights and interests.

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Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, on to the substance of the Bill at hand. You may not have sat for quite so long on such a long argument without a jury or without having to be asked to make a decision at the end of it all.

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Madam Speaker: I must say I am tempted to write a judgment at the end of it, but I will restrain myself. *(Laughter)*

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, do not tempt me to ask you to write one, because there are some things that we will have to address.

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In addressing this reply, in my first Budget after the last General Election, which I already said is the last General Election in which I will lead my party, I think it is important that hon. Members reflect a little on what they have said is my style in reply. They have called me many things and they have made many comparisons, none of which has the benefit of them being genuinely reflective and looking back at the things that we, on the GSLP Liberal side, were subjected to by the GSD when they were in government and we were in opposition. And so, I want to put it to them, in the context of the way that I am going to present these arguments, and indeed the way that I presented my arguments in the past, that my bite is worse than my bark. That is to say I may present the arguments in a way that I hope captures people's imagination and therefore enables them to understand what I am trying to say, but it is the facts that I put on the table that are devastating to their reputations, not the things that I may say about their style. That is the reality of how I am going to, I hope, demonstrate that the reasons that hon. Members have said that they are not going to be supporting this Bill are actually not good reasons. I will deal with all of the areas where hon. Members actually descended to the particulars of the Bill and did not just talk about general politics and demonstrate that in those areas they are wrong about the things that they have said. That is where my bite will be: on the facts, on the data and on the finances.

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I have to say also that I have been hugely impressed by some of the speeches of new hon. Members in this House. For people who were losing their parliamentary virginity in the context of a debate on the public finances, I have to say that Ministers on this side of the House have all done an incredible job, and some new Members on the other side have also done so. If I may say so, with respect, I thought that the youngest Member of this House actually presented one of the speeches that was most balanced and pointed because he did so without calling us anything, other than saying that in some areas we could do better. Well, I agree with him. In some areas, we can do better, not just in politics, not just in government and not just on the public finances, but in life. I think that is what life is about, trying to make every day better. My mother used to say to me, 'Make the good better and the better best'. That is the endeavour on which we are embarked. He did that without having to say anything about my leadership, my lineage, my parentage, all the sorts of things that hon. Members on the other side too often fall into the trap of thinking that they need to gild their lilies with in order to be able to achieve success in argument.

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140 I was minded also, in the context of hearing him when he was talking to us about
disengagement of young people in politics, that perhaps the problem is that politicians sometimes
make politics about politics itself. We sometimes perhaps overindulge ourselves and make politics
145 about other politicians. That may be one of the reasons that young people switched off. I do not
think that there is any young person in Gibraltar today, thinking about where they are going to go
tonight and how they are going to enjoy themselves over the weekend, who cares about what the
Hon. Mr Bossino thinks about the Hon. Mr Feetham's Father's Day Facebook post. I think they
care about matters relating to scholarships, apprenticeships, future jobs, the climate, etc.
Sometimes when we are busy looking at our navels, we are failing to look at the horizon, and
I think the Hon. Mr Origo was right to point that out, perhaps not exactly in those terms but it is
150 what I took from what he said.

I was drawn to the fact that in one of the Budget replies that I did, I think two or three years
ago, I analysed the fact that this debate about debt has been going on since 1971. Apart from
liking the odd fast car, I do enjoy my *Hansard*, Madam Speaker, and so I spend a lot of time reading
old *Hansards*. I found a debate that I think predated even the Hon. the Father of the House and
155 involved issues being put then between 1969 and 1972 when the IWBP were in government and
the AACR were opposition, and after 1972 with the AACR in government and the DPBG and the
others in opposition. I was able to show the House exactly the same terminology that we were
using today was being used on debt – too much debt, etc. The numbers were lower but
proportionally probably the same. I do think that the fact that this has continued from Sir Bob
160 Peliza to Sir Joshua Hassan and Sir Joe Bossano, continued into the time of Sir Peter Caruana ...
There are a lot of knights there, arguing for years, Madam Speaker. It is all about the same thing
and it is always fundamental. It is always the same argument. Of course it is relevant, but how is
it that we are losing the audience?

We are running a £¾ billion company here. We have an income of £750 million a year. If you
165 are running a household, it is very difficult to associate the finances of a household with the
finances of a country. You talk about the fact that something costs £200,000 and people might
say, 'For goodness' sake, what are these people talking about, £200,000? I have to make ends
meet with much less than that.' But to run this country today we are taking an income of
£750 million and we have an expenditure of just shy of that. This is the question of balancing the
170 Budget, making sure always that our income is more than our expenditure. We need to explain
that to our people in a way that is less self-indulgent.

For the purposes of the record, I would set out that if anybody looks at my speech on Monday,
I do not think there was anything in there which attacked hon. Members directly, personally or
otherwise. It attacked their record in government but not them. They are right in saying that I
175 would now say that in their responses they indulged in being a lot more personal than that. In
fact, I have just heard the Hon. Mr Bossino say, 'You see, we predicted it exactly'. Well, of course
they predicted it exactly, because I did not insult them and they did insult me. The only prediction
that they have been accurate in is in demonstrating that in a speech that can be analysed by any
third party to show that there were no insults, they countered with speeches that analysed by any
180 third party would result in, clearly, us being the subject of the sharpest part of their tongues. We
have heard about wolves, vultures and carcasses from hon. Members on the other side. Well, I
will let them know there is life in the old dog yet. Reports of my political death are greatly
exaggerated. We need to start talking more about the things that matter to people and less about
these bear attacks that the Hon. Mr Bossino told us he was going to deploy and then *clavao*, as he
185 says is exactly what he came to do, to attack. The only thing that Mr Bossino is able to accurately
predict is his own behaviour, so he predicts he is going to attack, he comes here, he attacks and
then he says, 'You see, exactly as I said'. Well, quite, of course.

Madam Speaker, I want to congratulate all new Members without exception and I want to tell
them that in the context of this place, politics, and this debate in particular, when I get things right
190 they are down to my team. When the Estimates are right, when we get a measure that is right,
they are down to the people advising me. But it is in the nature of this job and in the nature of the

responsibility that you carry when you become Chief Minister of Gibraltar that when things go wrong or when they were not quite right, they are down to me, because the buck stops with me. I fully take responsibility for all of the things that hon. Members can point to as a matter of policy and say, 'You did this and it was wrong. You did this and you turned.' Absolutely. The measure on
195 company taxation – the company levy that we did not proceed with – the pedestrianisation of Line Wall Road, and now the measure in respect of the pollution levy: political responsibility for those things lies with me, of course it does. In particular, those three are unforced errors, and therefore *mea culpa, mea culpa, mea maxima culpa*, as Mr Bossino, I think, says most mornings.
200 So, let's be clear, we are not shirking that responsibility.

JFK, in his famous inaugural, when he said, 'Do not ask what America can do for you, ask what you can do for America', said something else. It is not oft referred to, but it is a hugely important speech in terms of public service, not just of those in public service but of every citizen's obligation to the whole. He said, 'Together we shall save our planet, or together we shall perish in its flames.'
205 In that year, the President of the United States was looking, in the most difficult moments of the Cold War, at the potential for a nuclear Armageddon to engulf the whole of the world, but today, 60 years later, 'perishing in the flames of the planet' has more resonance when applied to the climate change that we can see coming than it does in every other respect. So, if we have made a mistake in trying to populate our Climate Change Fund with a levy, in trying to reduce pollution,
210 and in the way that we introduced that measure, well, we made a mistake for a good reason and in good faith. We fully accept that and we shall not be proceeding in any way with that pollution levy, because we get it. We are not tone deaf. We are clear that when we get something wrong we have to change it, and we got it wrong.

It is also true that in explaining that outside of this place, I made a mistake because people
215 have interpreted that my seeking to show that this levy would apply to me also as a driver has been suggested by people to be me somehow bragging or showing off. Nothing could be further from the truth. This particular vehicle that I referred to is not something that I have ever kept hidden and I disclosed on that day. Indeed, most mornings I toot my horn at Mr Bossino when I am coming back from taking my son to school in this Porsche, and he gaily waves back. There was
220 no secret here. I do not have an invisibility cloak that I have put around the car. But that misinterpreting is something I also feel terribly about, because sometimes appearances deceive. I pay £160 a month for this car, hardly the most expensive. Other brands are less remarkable. If you say that you have a Kia and you pay £600 a month for it, nobody will say that you have a luxury. If you pay £160 for a Porsche, it sounds like a luxury. If you drive a Discovery, like hon.
225 Members opposite – I make no criticism of them – it is worth three times the car that I drive, but of course, the marque matters and I accept that. There was absolutely no attempt to do anything other than brag, but I do want to clarify that the law applies to all of us and I did not import this vehicle outside of the rules on importation of vehicles older than 10 years. This vehicle was registered in Gibraltar when I bought it.

Madam Speaker, the fact is that people do not elect a Pope. I am not infallible. I am not the one who thinks that he is speaking from St Peter's chair. Those times have come and gone. We are not always right. We are not always perfect. Hon. Members were accusing us of making a U-turn, but if you are doing a measure and that measure is wrong and you stop it, you are asked to listen. If you listen and you stop and you change, you are accused of making a U-turn. U-turns
235 are about navigation. The only way to do good and proper navigation is to do a U-turn when you are going in the wrong direction. If your political enemies want you to continue going down that road, then you are even better off to say, 'No, that was not right, it is time to turn and go in a particular direction,' but in relation to those issues, not in relation to the fundamental issues on which we have always stayed the course whilst others have changed.

So, it is absolutely right to do a little bit of soul-searching when you seem to have got something wrong. It is absolutely right to go back to the drawing board and understand why you got it wrong. It is, in my view, one of the problems that the Hon. Mr Origo was pointing to. When you fall into the trap of this comic-book-style politics, where you either get everything right all of the time or
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245 you are not able to continue to discharge office, I do not think that that is, by any stretch of the
imagination, how we have presented ourselves. We have never presented ourselves as infallible,
far from it, because to do that would be the politics of the false prospectus, and the false
prospectus is what got Britain into the bind it is in: the false prospectus of Brexit, the false
prospectus which is the tabloid comic-book politics that we shall not ever pretend to be
responsible for. What people have with this Government is competence, competence on all the
250 issues that matter and confidence enough to fess up to a mistake the minute that we see it is a
mistake. I know that our political opponents would wish that having made a mistake, we continue
to dig. That is why we have been able to succeed successively in our representation of Gibraltar.

Madam Speaker, where we have got it right is in relation to the most important issue, which is
our external relations. I think that is absolutely clear. Hon. Members can do the list of the three
255 things that they say we have U-turned on, that we got wrong – I will repeat them for them: the
company levy, Line Wall Road and the pollution levy that we are not proceeding with – but no one
on this side of the House has ever for one moment suggested that we should give responsibility
for our external relations to the President of the European Commission, which is exactly what the
Leader of the Opposition suggested in an article in the *Gibraltar Chronicle*, the date of which I have
260 referred him to on a number of occasions. I think it is clear that that is exactly what happened.
None of us on this side of the House have done an academic analysis to suggest that Andorra is
not joint sovereignty. These are the fundamentals, and on the fundamentals we get it consistently
right. That is what matters.

I want to also react to what we saw happen on Monday evening. I *fundamentally* respect and
265 defend the right to protest. It goes to the core of what we represent on this side of the House.
Indeed, I trust it goes to the core of what hon. Members represent. It goes to the core of what
living in a free society is all about and what our constitutional freedom of assembly is all about. I
defend the right to protest. I defend the right to protest outside No. 6. I have protested outside
No. 6. That is democracy. I respect many of the issues that people who were protesting outside
270 No. 6 were raising. I hope to be able to address some of them during the course of this debate. I
hope to be able to meet some of the people who were outside No. 6 to address their areas of
concern, the issues that affect their day-to-day lives in these hard times through which we are
living. I fully get it. I am absolutely not tone deaf to that, but by the same token, I am sure that
every Member of this House and most members of our community, if not all members of our
275 community on reflection, will also join me in saying that whilst we respect and defend the right to
protest, *none of us* considers that there is a right to threaten personal violence or criminal damage,
and I would hope that the whole House would be united in that respect.

We have seen the effect of demagoguery on the 6th January riots on Capitol Hill in the United
States. That was not what we were seeing here, that was not what happened here on Monday,
280 but outside of what happened on Monday outside No. 6, there has been a cohort of online
anonymous cowards who have made threats of physical violence and criminal damage against me
and members of my family. Frankly, although I am sure that that will never come to pass, because
these are just cowards hiding behind an anonymous profile on social media, that is not the
Gibraltar that any of us deserve on either side of this House or outside of this House. Those who
285 seek the cloak of secrecy and lack of transparency are, in my view, nothing more than cowards in
a society like ours. (*Banging on desk*) Thank you. I am very pleased that we have unanimity on
that, Madam Speaker. If what we are seeing is people who want to lie and have the cloak of
anonymity for that purpose, then people should understand that those who are anonymous are
lying. If they put their name to things, they have to be able to defend the truth of what they say.
290 The most disgraceful and nefarious allegations are made with impunity because the social media
platform is in the United States. I trust I speak for all Members of the House in condemning such
sick and cowardly behaviour. That is not how we do business in Gibraltar.

I have seen, however, some of the points that some of the people protesting outside No. 6
were making and I think they are very credible points that need to be addressed in the context of
295 this debate in particular, addressing the point that Mr Origo was making about young people, but

more broadly about people generally in Gibraltar if they have these issues, a lot of which have been debated in this House but the argument has not cut through. It is important that we spend the time making these arguments and understanding them together so that, as a community, we can move forward together.

300 The first point that they make is about the pollution levy, and I want to be clear and say the pollution levy is dead and buried. It is not coming back. I have heard people say, 'Leave our cars alone.' I am leaving their cars alone.

People are saying if tax goes down 1% but the Minimum Wage has only gone up 30p, this does not cover the 5% Social Security increase. What is moving there is the cap, by 5%. It is not that
305 Social Security is going up by 5%. That is not what we have done. We have moved the cap by 5%, so that the salaries affected are moved. There is not an increase of 5%.

Then people say, 'You are putting up electricity and water by 2.6%.' Well, yes, that is what we need to do, but let's be very clear, that is 0.004p per unit, so it would not be correct to say that the tax decrease, or indeed the increase in the Minimum Wage, does not cover the increase in
310 electricity, because although one sounds, in percentage terms, like the other – the Minimum Wage is going up 3% and water and electricity are going up 2.4% – when the Minimum Wage goes up, it is going up by 30p, and when the water and electricity go up, they are going up by 0.004p. We are not giving with one hand and taking away with the other.

Rent has also increased, people say, and that was not in the Budget speech. No,
315 Madam Speaker, we said some years ago that we needed to put this on to a framework which did not put us in a situation where rents stayed so low that they were ludicrous. Rents had not gone up in something like 30 years; the GSD put them up once. We wanted to ensure that when rents went up they went up very slowly but they went up very surely, so that they stayed relevant but they did not hurt. That is why we said rents will go up by inflation. They will go up in April, which
320 is when the new financial year starts. We passed that law. I seem to recall we passed that law with the support of hon. Members opposite. There was a discussion about that in this House. We stopped the increase when inflation was 11%. We said, 'Hang on a minute, we have a mechanism here to raise housing rents by inflation, but this year, this 11%, post-COVID, with the war in
325 Ukraine and fuel prices going through the roof and the Liz Truss-Kwarteng Budget pushing interest rates up further, we are going to actually act to stop the increase.' Last year, because it was such a hike, we stopped the increase and said it would continue next year. We said that during the Budget debate last year and that is why there was no repeating it here, because that is something that happened last year and in April.

People are saying public sector workers get a small pay increase. It is not necessarily a small
330 pay increase. In the context of the entry grade, pay in Gibraltar has gone up by 20% in the past two years, because the entry grade has gone up from £18,000 to something like £22,000. On top of that, people on the entry grade salary are getting the £1,200 last year, non-consolidated, and the £1,200 this year, consolidated. Going through the pay scales just on this year, I think anybody under £50,000 is getting close to 3%, 4%, 5% pay increases, and then it goes down to inflation at
335 between £50,000 and £75,000 – and I will do more of an analysis later on – and then, between £75,000 to £100,000, it is a much lower pay increase, but the pay increase, because it is consolidated this year, goes throughout.

People then say, 'But why does this just happen in the public sector? Why aren't you putting up pay in the private sector?' For a simple reason: I do not control pay in the private sector. The
340 unions have a negotiating framework with private sector employers in different sectors. They do very well in those negotiations. We support them in it. The way that we support them is the part and the element that we do control, which is the Minimum Wage. The Minimum Wage was not always something that applied in Gibraltar. The Minimum Wage was introduced after 1988 in Gibraltar by the first Socialist Labour administration, by the Father of the House. It did not come
345 into the United Kingdom until the Blair government in 1997, so 10 years after it came in in Gibraltar. We introduced that from the Socialist Labour benches to have an element of a lever in the private sector, and this year we have put it up by 3%. That might not seem much. That is why

I wanted to do the exercise, saying it may not seem much now but look at how much the Minimum Wage has gone up under our administration. It has gone up by £2,750 in three years. That is almost a thousand pounds in the last three years. It has gone up by £6,500 since we took over. That is, in effect, £500 a year on the 39-hour week.

Hon. Members opposite sometimes say that one of the things that they pray in aid of their arguments is how the Chamber and the Federation of Small Businesses say they are disappointed with our Budget. Well, they cannot have it both ways, because this is one of the things that disappoints the Chamber and the Federation. We believe that the Minimum Wage had to first be upped from where it was, it was not high enough, and then had to keep pace with inflation. The Chamber say – and they represent their members, of course, I understand that – ‘It is too high, you are pushing it too high.’ They say they agree with the Chamber and the Federation. No problem. That is why we are a party of the left (**A Member:** Yes.) and they are not. But let’s be clear, Madam Speaker, if you are outside No. 6 Convent Place and people there are saying the Minimum Wage has not gone up, and you are standing there with them and you agree with the Chamber and the Federation, you are standing at least on different shores of the pavements outside Convent Place.

I fully respect those who say the Minimum Wage has not gone up enough. I wish I could put it up more. I want us to get to a living wage. That is what the Father of the House is talking about, upping productivity. We want fewer jobs on the Minimum Wage, more jobs on the higher salaries. That is why we are putting up the Minimum Wage. In judging how we have put it up and judging Members opposite – and the leader of the GSD today was the Deputy Chief Minister in a GSD Government for four years, of which he was a Member for eight years but was only Deputy Chief Minister for four years – the GSD did this thing called the ‘election gimmick’. They would put up the Minimum Wage every election year and not the other years. We can point to always putting up the Minimum Wage at least by inflation and having put it up by much more than inflation, which is why it has gone up £6,500 in the time that I am here – £500 per year, in effect. I hope people understand that, because it is important that they see this in the context of how these issues have evolved and how although I cannot put up salaries in the private sector I am trying to stimulate salaries in the private sector by doing two things: putting up salaries in the public sector, which is the competitor to the private sector in salary terms and terms; and pushing up the bottom in the private sector with the Minimum Wage.

On COVID, people say, ‘Look, we understand,’ – the public actually says that in a way that is more comprehensible than sometimes the Opposition say it, because the Opposition supported this £500 million borrowing – ‘but do you have to repay the COVID debt by taking from me? Can’t you find another stream of income from which you might pay the COVID debt?’ Well, that is the job that we are trying to do. We are trying to bring other streams of income so that we produce other sources of income and revenue for the public finances, so that that goes towards the £500 million. But we nonetheless have to continue to run our affairs in keeping with the golden rule, and the amounts left over have to go to the COVID debt because what we cannot do is, having incurred the COVID debt to pay our generation, leave the debt to future generations without taking responsibility for it. I know that that is not what people want, but it is the way that we have to balance the books. To an extent, you elect a government to make these difficult decisions and get that calibration right, which we think we did get right in this Budget, other than for the issue of the pollution levy.

Another thing that people are saying is, ‘It is all very good that you get an additional amount at the bottom because you are dealing with the bottom pay; what about the rest of the salaries?’ What we are dealing with is parity, and it is at the bottom that there are parity issues with the United Kingdom but we are committed to parity. I said so in my speech. If there are parity issues elsewhere, if elsewhere in the scales we miss parity with the UK, we will adjust to parity because the parity agreements relate to all and each of the grades, except the grades have changed a lot in the United Kingdom, and that is why we are still talking to the unions about where the landing points are. The entry point upping is not just about the entry point, it is about parity, and that will

400 happen in other grades also. But of course, the increase cuts across the spine points because you are getting £1,200 consolidated on all spine points below £50,000, you are getting £900 on all spine points between £50,000 and £75,000, and £600 on all spine points between £75,000 and £100,000 on basic pay. So, the push is across the spine scales below £100,000.

405 Another issue that people who protested are saying is relevant is that they want us to stop enforcing parking rules and they want us to build more multistorey car parks which we do not charge Gibraltarians for. Well, we have been the pioneers of that. We built a very large multistorey car park here which we do not charge Gibraltarians for. We did not build it as a pay and display, as hon. Members opposite did in respect of Devil's Tower Road. It is expensive. We are making revenue from that by selling some of the parking spaces, renting others, charging foreign nationals and giving Gibraltarians three hours free. If we are able to do more, we will. People say there are
410 too many high-rise buildings for the rich, which seems to be Government's favourite activity, I hear that they say. Actually, the Deputy Chief Minister is spending most of his time fighting people who want to put up high-rise buildings which do not fit in with how we see Gibraltar should be developing. We do not do any high-rise building for the rich; none of it, zero. We do high-rise
415 building for affordable homes, which is what we have done at Hassan Centenary Terraces. When we sell land, or where they sold land, the premium that we are paid for that land is invested in the Government General Account and that is what then enables us to build affordable housing for our people or rental housing for our people. I hope that also is understood. It may sound simple to do, but it is very expensive to build a multistorey car park and not recover the money from charging
420 for car parking. I hope that – I am sure – is understood.

Madam Speaker, the other issue that people are raising is why haven't yet equalised the pensionable age? I think the Father of the House, who understands this area better than most, has been very clear in his explanations. He has suggested how dangerous it could be for Gibraltar if we were to do that before we have settled matters relating to Social Security in the context of
425 our future relationship with the EU and how well we will be able to do it more beneficially for all residents of Gibraltar, in particular men, if we are able to do it at the right time. I know that time passes. On the treaty – and I will say this on a number of occasions during the course of my address this morning – you can solve that issue quickly, you can do the treaty quickly, of course you can, but then you will be doing the treaty that somebody else wants you to do. If you want to do the
430 right treaty, you have to take the time to negotiate it, and fight through all of the things that we have heard in the Spanish Senate etc., to do a deal that is safe and secure and beneficial. If that is what doing the Social Security deal and other things is dependent on, those things have to be delayed. Otherwise, we allow those things to become a pressure on us to concede something in the negotiation, and that is not how we do negotiations on this side of the House. I am sure that
435 every Gibraltarian will understand that although this delays our ability to deliver on our cast-iron commitment to do an equalised pensionable age for pensioners across the gender divide, we cannot accelerate it if that means ceding on fundamentals in the context of the negotiation or getting up from the negotiation when in fact there is a chance we could continue to successfully negotiate.

440 Zero-hour contracts needing to stop is one of the issues that concern people. I agree. It is in our manifesto. We are working on it in respect of government contracts.

And why should government rates for everything go up by inflation? The reason for that is that we need to keep government rates current. If we do not put in an inflation increase on public sector charges, then all that happens is that 20 years from now you find that you are charging 50p
445 for a passport and the passport is costing the Government £30, and therefore we are having to subsidise a passport by £29.50. Those numbers are not right, but actually it is the sort of thing that is happening. We are subsidising a lot of public services, which is why we start to have to fund public services more, which is how you start to fall off the edge on the golden rule, because if public servants are providing a service to the public which the public pay for, not just through
450 taxation, which is one of the ways that you pay for public services, but also in the thing that they get, then you start to upset the apple cart. So that is why we put things up. Again, these are very

low amounts. If something costs a pound today, by putting it up by inflation of 2.6%, rounded off to the nearest 50p it is going to cost £1.02 — 2½p, but we will not charge the ½p because we have got rid of the ½p piece – so this is not a huge increase. It is designed to make sure that we do not get shocks, so that we do not have to change fees, as we have had to do in the past when something that in 1976 cost 50p now still costs 50p and we have to change it and say it is going to cost £25. That is why we are doing it in that way, which I do not think in any way dilutes the Minimum Wage increase, or the reduction in taxation by 1%.

Madam Speaker, I hope I have very respectfully gone through the 10 points that I have been given that have concerned people who were outside No. 6 Convent Place. I understand they may have more points that they want to raise with me, and I will take the time either in this place or directly in person to explain the Government's view of why we are taking the measures that we are taking, which are proportionate, which are designed to protect working people and the most vulnerable, and deliver what we have to deliver so that this great entity that is Gibraltar continues to move forward with safe public finances.

Let me now move on to the arguments that we have heard more generally from Members opposite and not just from outside of this House. Of course, their arguments this week have been, all of them, based around the fact that we were going to do a pollution levy that we are not going to do anymore. I fully understand that. The Hon. Mr Clinton is not known for making catchy remarks, but he said this is a car-crash Budget. I asked for it, didn't I, so fair enough. That goes to one measure, but that is the measure that we are not proceeding with.

But what about putting everything in the context not just of that mistake that we made but all of the good things that we have done, whether it is something like going back to the United Nations when hon. Members did not go to the C24 — they made the decision that they did not want to go to the United Nations to defend Gibraltar, although Spain was still going to be there; building every school in Gibraltar new, except for the ones which had already been built by the GSLP and we are making as new with the refurbishments; establishing a Primary Care Centre just for children and a new Primary Care Centre for adults too; putting much more money in the pockets of our public sector workers; upping the Minimum Wage; increasing pensions every year; increasing disability benefits every year, because I will point out to hon. Members later that they did not do that. I genuinely believe, Madam Speaker, that if you pause for a moment and look at what we did in this Budget and you accept that we have come to this in good faith — we made a mistake on the pollution levy, we have put it to one side — the rest of the measures and the rest of our record is actually not bad. It is not perfect, because we are not perfect and we do not pretend to be perfect, but it is not bad. It shows genuine hard work designed to do our best for our people, protect working people and protect the most vulnerable.

When you compare it to their record — and I will go through a lot of it — they gave a loan of £7 million to a developer and lost that money. They overspent in the GHA — which they say now is the most heinous offence — much more than we did; I will go through the numbers. They suggested that the President of the European Union should take over our foreign relations. We think that is a monumental mistake, which shows an error of judgement which goes beyond just the possibility of taxing a car.

Madam Speaker, when we get things wrong we listen and we change course, but we never get it wrong on the fundamental issues. People tell us that they want honest politicians and they want politicians who listen. Well, I do not think there could be a better demonstration than what we have done this week: we listen and we change course. I have yet to hear the Hon. Mr Azopardi say, 'You know what, on reflection, I was wrong to suggest that the President of the European Union' — today Ms von der Leyen — 'should be responsible for Gibraltar's external relations instead of the United Kingdom. I was wrong about that. I listened, I have heard the arguments and I was wrong about that.' I have never heard him say that. I have heard him talk about everything else, but not address that issue to which he put his name. I get it wrong and fess up. He gets it wrong and does not seem to want to accept when he has got it wrong on something as potentially fundamental as that. Of course, he was saying that with the United Kingdom outside of the

505 European Union, so the President of the European Commission in charge of our external relations, with the UK out of the EU and Spain at the top table – that seems to me like a bigger mistake than the pollution levy.

Madam Speaker, that is what leads me to take the view that when I have gone through these arguments that people protesting outside No. 6 genuinely have concerns about, and have respectfully dealt with them, and I see the things that hon. Members say which are contrary to the things being said by the people who are outside No. 6 – because they are siding with the GFSB, they are siding with the Chamber, who are saying that we put up Minimum Wage too much, and the protesters are saying, ‘You didn’t put the Minimum Wage up enough, you didn’t put public sector salaries up enough, you didn’t put electricity charges up enough,’ ... The Chamber is telling us that we need to pay our way, that the Minimum Wage is too high and that the public sector costs are too high. So, they are siding with both sides. That is what leads me to believe that hon. Members are not political bellwethers. They are not predicting the weather; they are political surfers. They will jump on any wave that is heading towards the shore of No. 6 Convent Place – *any wave*.

The reality that Mr Bossino disclosed during the course of Question Time is that they would attack us, whatever the results. As I will show you in the course of my address, Madam Speaker, when we declared the record surplus of £80 million – which in fact, if we had not given the £30 million to the government companies in that year, would have been a record surplus of £110 million, calculated as Mr Clinton suggests we should calculate everything – they criticised us for a simple reason: because we had a surplus of £80 million. They said, ‘You should not have a surplus of £80 million. You should have given it back to people in more tax cuts, higher salaries etc.’ When we do not have a surplus they say, ‘You have put salaries up too much.’ We have also given £10 million back to people who had overpaid in tax. Of course: it is their money. They did not used to do that; they used to hang on to the money. So, they will criticise us whether we have a surplus or do not have a surplus, whether the surplus is large or small, because it is clear that hon. Members have that philosophy which the Hon. Mr Bossino explained to you: that they are, in effect, in opposition to attack. The problem is when they attack and do not hit the target and they hit Gibraltar rather than just hitting us. I will have a lot to say about how they have hit out at Gibraltar, in effect – internationally, in particular, and our remarkable success in terms of the movement towards self-government – in their efforts to bring back direct rule in the context of the Inquiries Act.

Madam Speaker, one of the issues that I will deal with is also this question of the contributions to the companies, which the Hon. Sir Joe explained in the course of his address and we highlighted in the Government Press Release yesterday. But when I deal with taxation, one of the things I am going to talk to the hon. Members about – in fact, I will do it now – is what I heard the representative of the Gibraltar Tax Association saying. He said actually, when you look at the 15%, which was long-tailed and which is the international standard, that is not going to make us in any way uncompetitive in the European context. The companies that come here now do not look at that. Holding companies do not pay tax because that is a trading tax. When you couple that with the reduction to 25% of personal tax, then even small companies have not yet done the analysis properly, because they will be even better off. They will be able to take a dividend into the hands of the directors or the shareholders, and that will produce a saving in their hands which will mean that the 2.5% increase will not be relevant to them. That is not an analysis that hon. Members did, so I am grateful that a tax professional has done that analysis, because this is a taxation issue and tax professionals are the ones we need to be listening to.

But of course, in burnishing their credentials as representatives of the working class, which they have never been and they never will be, hon. Members said that we should be more progressive in taxation, that we should not have a flat rate of tax of 25%. It makes sense: a flat rate of tax of 25% for somebody earning £150,000 or earning £1 million, and the person earning £30,000 paying 25% would not be progressive. I understand that, but that is not our system; that is their system. In fact, their system brought down the rates that people paid to in the region of

560 5%, I think. In Gibraltar, if you made £1 million you paid 5% on any income over £1 million, and if you made £40,000 you paid 25% on £40,000. That was their system, which I think they were, rightly, criticising without realising it was their system. What we did was change that system. We put all of the bands at 25%, especially over £500,000. They had a system. The GSD system was that you paid 25% up to £500,000 and then you started to pay less, not more. You paid 18% on income of between £500,000 and £700,000, and then anything beyond £700,000 was taxed at 5%. That was their system. So, when they were outside No. 6 Convent Place, I assume they were saying to people there, 'Yes, we agree with you to an extent because we think the rich should be taxed less and the poor should be taxed more,' because that was their system. What did we do? We

565 changed that system. Now it is 25% across the board. We think that is better. In fact, it was not 25% across the board, it was 27% because when we put it up by 2% we put it up at 2% across the board, and when we brought it down to 26% last year we did not bring the 27% down for the top rate, we kept it at 27%. We only brought it down in an accelerated way for those who were earning less.

570 There is a lot of detail there about the allowance-based system (ABS) and the gross income-based system (GIB) system etc., but we were the ones who changed their system which taxed the poor more than they taxed the rich. I would at least hope that they acknowledge that; in other words, that they say, just like I have done today, 'Fair enough, we got that wrong because we are not infallible.' They have, in effect, done so, in my view. They have, in effect, done that which I

575 said is perfectly understandable in politics when you make a mistake, which is to make a U-turn, because they have said that what they did was wrong. They have said that taxing less at the top and more at the bottom was wrong, but it is what they did. It is a system they introduced. It was their inception of a tax system that taxed less at the top. I welcome that U-turn from hon. Members. That one is huge. Mine was about something we were going to do which we did not do. This is about something that they did, that they subjected every taxpayer in Gibraltar to. In other words, the people on the incomes of over £1 million, of over £500,000, of over £700,000, have got away with paying that lower tax for years because they introduced the system, and now they have changed their minds on it. *Rectificar es de sabios*: to rectify is the wise man's act, I have been told repeatedly this week. I welcome that they have rectified their position in respect of a

580 system of taxation that rewarded the rich more than it rewarded those who needed to pay lower rates.

What I found remarkable was that hon. Members were, during the course of their speeches, some of which I greatly welcome, referring the public to pages of the Estimates Book, which is online – there it is, it is all online – when we are told that we are the least transparent, most

590 secretive Government ever, and yet hon. Members during their speeches say, 'It is online at page 6 of the Estimates Book; you can see it in line 47.' It demonstrates that quite contrary to what they have said, we are more transparent. The numbers are there; they can be looked at.

This is not an easy exercise. Going through the Government Estimates is not easy. It is not something which I ever did when I was not a Member of this House. Even when I was a Member

595 of this House, if I had not had the tutelage of the Hon. the Father of the House to take me through *a palo*, as they say, to understand the Estimates Book and how it works – the odd *palo* comes even now, believe me ... It is very difficult to understand, but it is there. Just because it is difficult, do not pretend to people it is not there. All of the numbers are in the Estimates Book and they have referred people to the pages of it, demonstrating that that is the case.

600 Madam Speaker, the biggest weakness that I found in the speeches of Members opposite was when they did the analysis of how they say, under Mr Clinton's analysis, that we now have a deficit and not a surplus, because in doing so, one of their speakers was trashing what one of their other speakers talks about being the golden legacy of the GSD. Mr Clinton says, 'If you do this in this way, you do not actually have a surplus, you have a deficit,' and the Hon. Mr Bossino says, 'You inherited a golden legacy from the GSD: you had surplus after surplus.' Well, not if you calculate

605 it according to Mr Clinton, which is the exercise that the Hon. the Father of the House helped us to do: the Clinton deficit. That is to say, if the GSD had taken from the bottom line the amounts

610 that they contributed by way of advance to the government companies actually by way of
payment above the line, as we have been doing until now, they would never have been able to
declare any of their surpluses. They would have been declaring, for those three years, deficits.
We, conversely, would have come in to declare the highest surplus in our history, by far. In other
words, if we did it like the former GSD Government did it, we would not have declared the surplus
of £80 million, we would have declared a surplus of £110 million because we took the £30 million
off above the line. I will come to that and I will show the analysis that the Father of the House did.
615 And yet, I thought that the Father of the House, uncharacteristically, missed a trick because he
only talked about the Clinton deficit, whilst in order to understand Mr Clinton's speech – and I will
analyse it in a few minutes – you have to understand the underlying reality of what he is saying.
Clinton cuts: there have to be Clinton cuts to personnel, there have to be Clinton cuts to salaries
and there have to be Clinton cuts to services, because that is what he is telling us we have to do.

620 So, when I see him outside Convent Place with people who are asking us for more services, for
higher salaries, I am almost minded to say it must be that opposites do attract, because the people
who are in Convent Place are saying the opposite of what Mr Clinton is saying. And believe me,
Madam Speaker, they do not have a common enemy, because we are not the enemy of the
people. We are not the enemy of those who were outside No. 6. We deeply respect how difficult
625 it is for some people. We do not for one moment trivialise it and we will be working with those
people to ensure that we stretch out the hand of understanding and look at what more we can do
to ameliorate the effects of this difficult time for everyone – and it will not be Clinton cuts, Madam
Speaker, of that I can assure you.

But look at what we have to face. Mr Clinton says Sir Joe calls the Estimates non-binding, as if
630 that were a bad thing. It is in the nature of the terminology of the thing that it has to be non-
binding, otherwise it would not be an estimate. To boot, the first word after 'confidential' is 'draft'.
They are draft estimates because during the course of this debate we could agree to change
things. Hon. Members, you did not ask us to. He has asked us to do one thing which is political,
but he has not said, 'Look, I think this number should change because I think you should calibrate
635 it in another way.' That is why it is draft, that is why it is non-binding, and then when it becomes
the estimate, not draft ... New Members will not know. This is the book that is white. After the
debate, if the Budget passes, the Book is made the law and it will be circulated again – identical –
without the word 'draft'. But it is still an estimate. That is why it is non-binding. It cannot be
binding, other than as an estimate, Madam Speaker.

640 There is no need for hon. Members opposite, led by Mr Clinton, to think that there is something
nefarious by the fact that the Hon. the Father of the House says, with 52 years' experience and a
deeper understanding of this process than any of us, that this process is a non-binding process.
How is it non-binding? For a simple reason: because we do something which the Hon. Mr Clinton
is very keen on, rightly so, which is called the supplementary appropriation, which is where, if
645 something has changed, we come back and save that change with a law. I have published the one
for 2022-23 and I said we will be dealing with it in September. That will deal with the changes for
the financial year 2022-23. The law actually provides for what Sir Joe Bossano has said to be the
case. The law actually provides the mechanism for these Estimates to be non-binding and for us
to come back and make the change that is necessary as a result of higher expenditure or any other
650 change.

But look at the language that the Hon. Mr Clinton deploys. He says that we have 'raided' the
Sinking Fund. When we sit in No. 6 Convent Place and are advised by the professionals in the
Ministry of Finance – and we agree usually these things have to be recorded properly, not just by
email, so there is a printout – I sign, I say I agree, put the date, and all the rest of it, I do not wear
655 a bandana, I do not put a gun on the table and I do not put it to the Financial Secretary's head. I
would not stand much of a chance against him if I did, I dare say; he is the most vehement
protector of our coffers. There is no raid. There is a decision made in the context of what is the
proper administration of the public finances of Gibraltar, made very carefully and very
professionally based on advice and in keeping with the law. We have the Public Finance (Control

660 and Audit) Act. The auditor audits, and if we get it right he says nothing; if we do not get it right
he says a lot. That is the rule. It is not a raid. This is not a money heist. Nobody sings *Bella Ciao* as
we start to arrive in the mornings at Convent Place to work out what we are going to put in the
Budget. The language of saying that we are raiding the Sinking Fund when the Sinking Fund is
665 created for that purpose ... The Sinking Fund is created by a law for the very purpose for which we
took £10 million from it. That is not raiding. That is using it properly and in keeping with the law.
There are two completely different concepts in play but Mr Clinton wants to run the hare of a raid,
and that is less than unfair. That, Madam Speaker —

Minister for Inward Investment and the Savings Bank (Hon. Sir J J Bossano): And they closed
670 it down.

Hon. Chief Minister: Indeed, Madam Speaker, the Father of the House, with his elephantine
memory ... If only he were the nominee for the Democratic Party somewhere else, we would not
have the issues that we might have in the western world. The Sinking Fund was closed by hon.
675 Members. They did not raid it, they raided all of it – to use their terminology – and closed it down.
We reintroduced it for just this purpose.

I come back to what the Hon. Mr Origo said, because we degrade politics when we do this. If
young people are hearing that the Opposition say that the Government has raided a fund, that is
what starts the hares running and people saying, ‘Oh, for goodness’ sake, that sounds like thieving,
680 robbery – they are raiding.’ That degrades politics, and what it does, which is bad, bad, bad, is it
does not poison people against us only – of course, it is designed to poison people against us – it
poisons the well and it poisons against all of us in the long term. It disaffects the public, in
particular young people, so I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman: we need to do this in a
different way.

685 Mr Clinton says the GDP to debt ratio is irrelevant. I tend not to agree, for a simple reason: it
is a measure of our economy that was not introduced by a Chief Minister when Chief Ministers
started doing analysis of our economy at the time of the Father of the House. It was a measure of
our economy introduced when a GSD Chief Minister was doing the measures of our economy.
They decided that giving the GDP to debt ratio was an important part of this debate. We have
690 continued it. Of course, it is not relevant to somebody who has a problem making ends meet, but
none of what we do here is relevant to them except the work that we do to put up Disability
Benefit, public sector pay and the Minimum Wage. All of those things matter, but, in the analysis
of how we can do that and why we do that, they introduced the GDP to debt ratio – but of course,
because it is a figure that works in our favour, they have suddenly decided they do not want it.

695 The same is true of the GDP per capita. It is irrelevant, Mr Clinton says. Well, Madam Speaker,
he is just agreeing with me. I have said, for years in this debate, this figure means very little; it
certainly means very little out there – last year, in particular. In the middle of a cost-of-living crisis
the GDP per capita means nothing. It is based on average incomes multiplied in dollars, divided by
the population, but not on the basis of half your working population coming in every day. I did not
700 introduce the GDP per capita calculation into this debate, neither did Sir Joe Bossano when he
was Minister for Public Finance. It was a GSD Minister for Public Finance who introduced the GDP
per capita ratio. As a result, when you measure how the Gibraltar economy is doing, I am advised
you have to keep the same metrics, so I keep to the metrics that they established as the proper
metrics, even though I agree with him that they are irrelevant. Why does he think that it is
705 irrelevant? For a simple reason, not for any of these reasons that I have given; because it works in
our favour, because it is better in our time than it was under them. The GDP to debt ratio mattered
when they were in government, but it does not matter now because it shows that our Government
did better than theirs on GDP to debt ratio. That is the reality. That is what we are dealing with.
The same is true about the GDP to tax ratio. Joe Bossano never talked about the GDP to tax ratio
710 when he was Chief Minister in this House presenting the Estimates. Sir Peter Caruana did. That is

why we refer to it, to keep that metric. Why don't they like it? Because it is better under us than it was under them. It is that simple, Madam Speaker.

715 Mr Clinton says the reality is that Joe Bossano is no Warren Buffett, because he has created this fund in the Savings Bank. Well, he is a better Warren Buffett than the one we had before, who left us with zero in the Savings Bank. At least we know, to coin a Buffett phrase, that when the tide goes out the Savings Bank will not be caught without its bathing trunks on. Indeed, it will have 76 million, this year 80 million bathing trunks to rely on. That is what Joe Bossano has achieved.

720 Mr Clinton says, 'The fact that we get information about the Savings Bank is not a demonstration that you are transparent: we only get it because I ask for it.' Well, okay, but you ask for it and you get it, which demonstrates the transparency. One of the things we could do is simply say, 'Okay, we will put it on the website every month, because we put it on the website every month. You ask the question, so it goes up on the website every month.' But he is paid almost £40,000 to ask questions. He wants to come and ask questions. Is he saying he is tired of asking the questions? Well, that is his job. His job is to ask the questions and get the answers.

725 The Hon. Mr Clinton then defends the record of the GSD for having used the Savings Bank reserve. He says there is nothing wrong in using the Savings Bank reserve. None of us have said that they did anything wrong in using the Savings Bank reserve. We have not said that it was illegal to use the Savings Bank reserve, (**Hon. Sir J J Bossano:** Or agreed.) we have not said that they snaffled the money in the Savings Bank reserve, we have not said that they raided the Savings Bank reserve. We have said they took the Savings Bank reserve, I said very specifically, into the
730 Government General Account – not into anybody's pocket, not for any nefarious purpose, but we still think it was not the right thing to do, because we believe as an article of faith that you should have rainy day funds and this is one of them, in the Savings Bank reserve. The Hon. Mr Clinton is unhappy that we have not used the reserve. Okay, he may be unhappy about that, but if we had
735 used the reserve we would no longer have the reserve and we would be doing what they did, which was legal and is their policy but is not our policy.

Hon. Members will forgive us for pursuing our policy because we got a mandate to pursue our policy. It is not the widest mandate we have ever got – it is not the mandate that Joe Bossano achieved in 1992, it is not the mandate that Fabian Picardo achieved in 2015 or in 2019, but it is a
740 mandate, just like the one that Fabian Picardo achieved in 2011, which led to the one in 2015. Hon. Members need to remind themselves of why we have been elected. We have been elected to do the things that we defended during the course of the general election campaign, and I will demonstrate that we are doing them. That is why we put tax down, just like we said during the course of the general election campaign.

745 The hon. Gentleman said, 'Who advises the Chief Minister on these measures?' Madam Speaker, as I said before, when I get things wrong it is my fault, so I am not going to disclose who advised me in respect of the pollution levy. I will be very clear about the fact that it is my fault but is also true that one would like to ask who advises *them* to say that we are running a regressive tax system that taxes the rich as much as it taxes the poor when we have the opposite system and they had the one that taxed the rich less than the poor.
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When he raises issues about Community Care – and once again, I think what he is trying to do is to make hares run – I want to be very clear that the reserves of Community Care, we are told by the trustees of Community Care, are much higher than those left by the GSD in 2011, and we will always ensure that we work with the trustees of Community Care to ensure that payments will
755 continue as long as we are in government and we will not take steps to close down Community Care, which is what they last said in 2011.

Madam Speaker, when dealing with the issue of the Finance Bill, the Hon. Mr Clinton said the last Finance Bill was in the time of Sir Joshua and we should be doing things by way of a Finance Bill, and was recommending to Nigel Feetham that it should be done in a particular way. This is
760 not an issue where we have an article of faith against it. This is an issue of timings and the Book being done in April, considerations with the Tax Office and other officials taking part later, the need for six weeks of publication of a Bill before you can debate it, etc., we can certify it as urgent.

765 It is not an article of faith. But I thought, Madam – Madam Clinton, I was going to say! Ay! Madam Speaker, Mr Clinton gave it away by referring to Sir Joshua. The fact that the last Finance Bill happened when Sir Joshua was in power shows that the GSLP did not do it when we were in government and we have not done it now in government either, but it also shows that the GSD never did it when they were in government. In other words, the GSD are now saying, ‘What you should be doing ...’ but are unable to point to themselves having done it.

770 Mr Clinton sits alongside the Leader of the Opposition, who was Deputy Chief Minister for four years and a Minister for eight years in a GSD Government, and they never had a Finance Bill, although we heard from the Hon. Mr Azopardi in a moment of remarkable political candour that he was not able to influence any matters of public finance when he was in government. It was quite remarkable because all my Ministers influence public finance matters. *(Interjection)* We meet in respect of the preparation of the Estimates Book etc. I thought that was a remarkable demonstration of how the GSD Governments work, quite remarkable.

775 Madam Speaker, the speeches that I heard from the new hon. Members of this side of the House filled me with hope at the energy, vigour and ability of the new Ministers in the Government since October 2023. I shall say something about that later on as I go through some of the subject areas that hon. Members raised, but it is remarkable to see the strength of ability that there is now on this side of the House joining those of us who have been here since 2011.

780 Of course, the fact that that is obvious was not enough for hon. Members. The Hon. Mr Azopardi wanted to start by talking about not any of the issues that are candescent and important to those who were outside Convent Place who have issues making ends meet. Most of what we were treated to in the context of the Leader of the Opposition’s soporific address to this House sounded more – at least to me – like an interview for the priesthood rather than a speech of a Leader of the Opposition addressing a Parliament on a day when the Chief Minister might have got a battering from anybody else.

785 What they wanted to talk about was the leadership of my party. Hon. Members and Mr Bossino himself also spent more time talking about the leadership of the GSLP and the leadership election in the GSLP than they did doing any analysis of the figures. I do not think Mr Bossino referred to many figures, to tell you the truth.

Hon. D J Bossino: I think I did.

795 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Oh, did you? I must have missed it. It is really quite remarkable, because if they think that Nigel Feetham has declared war – those were his terms – by saying, ‘Happy Father’s Day,’ and, ‘If people want me, I am here to stand for the leadership of the party,’ what did they do to each other in the things that they said about each other during their leadership election at the tail end of last year? There was little left of any of them at the end of it. One thing is a leadership election to come, another thing is a war of attrition between candidates to lead a party: one in one direction, progressive, and the other in the other direction, Christian democratic, and never the twain shall meet. In the United States, where primaries are a common thing to become the presumptive nominee, people say nicer things about each other – and that is cutthroat – than they said about each other during the course of their leadership election campaign. They are riven red raw with divisions on that side. Their divisions led to an editorial in the *Gibraltar Chronicle* about how raw those divisions are in that party. Here, a newly elected Member of the Parliament has said – in my view, as I have interpreted it – ‘I am enjoying this. I am ready to step up if my party wants.’ What is wrong with that to such an extent that in the context of a Budget debate it merits mention? Very simple: stirring the pot. *‘Pim Pam, pelea Pom’*
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810 *(Laughter)* That is what hon. Members have been reduced to. This is the Budget speech of the Leader of the Opposition and of the presumptive Leader of the Opposition, to try to *meter follón* on the government benches. It is really quite remarkable.

Madam Speaker, there are real issues. There are people outside Convent Place who are feeling the pinch, who have serious problems with their economy, who are raising issues that *they* are

815 not raising, which I am addressing in my speech today respectfully. And what are they doing? They
 are talking about the Hunger Games. Does the hon. Gentleman think ... indeed, do any of the hon.
 Gentlemen on that side who addressed this issue – that is to say the Hon. Mr Bossino or the Hon.
 Mr Azopardi – think that anybody on this side of the House is going to be foolish enough to take
 820 their advice on leadership and how to win an election, whether it is a leadership election or a
 general election? Come on. He had to leave his party in 2003 after the arrival of the other
 Mr Feetham. He said he was leaving because – he might want to forget that, no? – he said,
 Feethams were not of GSD stock, as if politics was about a ground-down chicken cube that you
 dissolve in boiling water. For goodness' sake, he left the GSD because Mr Feetham had arrived. I
 hear from a sedentary position the hon. Member saying *como tú*. I have never been in the GSD; I
 825 have never had to leave it. I have just left it in the wilderness, nothing else. *(Interjection)*

Then he started a new party – I suppose that is the only leadership election he did well in, the
 one of the party he formed, so he formed himself as leader. And then he complains that I say he
 is not as good as Mr Feetham and that Mr Feetham was not as good as Mr Caruana. Well,
 Mr Caruana was obviously an outstanding leader of the GSD because he won four general
 830 elections for them; that is empirical, it is objective, it is obvious. Whether we liked him or did not
 like him is irrelevant. We are doing an analysis of the odds: he won four times. He stood six times,
 he won four. The Hon. the Father of the House beat him once and I beat him once. That is not his
 record. He is really – and, again, I am making these arguments but I am not insulting anyone – a
 prize fighter, but he has never won in the ring. He is a cage fighter who gets slaughtered every
 835 time he gets in the cage. He has been knocked out twice and he has lost on points twice: knocked
 out because he stood as a leader of a party and did not even get representation in the House.
 What makes him think he would do better than us in the ring with the Spaniards, the Europeans
 and the Brits?

In 2003 he left because Mr Feetham, he said, was not of the same stock as him for the GSD,
 840 and yet in 2019 they stood together being so ostensibly politically close that it felt like I was
 watching a same-sex couple going up to the altar when they were coming here to sign on. In 2007
 the Hon. Mr Azopardi said that Mr Caruana was finished, he said that Joe Bossano was finished
 and that *he* should become Chief Minister of Gibraltar. Well, they both knocked his block off and
 he did not get elected to this House. In 2011 he said, surprisingly, that Mr Caruana was finished
 845 and I was not good enough. We both knocked his block off and he did not get elected to this
 House. Then he came to me and started to work with me and told me that we had the best
 Government ever, that we were the modern GSD because we were all graduates and we were all
 working so well. Then he came to me and said, 'Given that Peter Montegriffo has not agreed to
 stand as leader of the GSD,' – and he said this publicly, it is no secret – 'I am going to take the
 850 chance now because it is my last chance to become Chief Minister.' In 2019, having become
 leader, he did not become Chief Minister of Gibraltar. I think he led them to one of their greatest
 ever defeats. In 2023, when the Government was facing its fourth successive election, he says,
 tired out of ideas etc., he can talk about the margin as much as he likes but he did not win the
 election.

855 Madam Speaker, the fact is that the person giving advice to Mr Feetham, to Ms Orfila, to
 Ms Arias-Vasquez and to Prof. Cortes was not giving advice to them – in fact, did not give that
 advice to Ms Orfila. I will come back to that. The person giving advice to them can only beat one
 person that we know of, Mr Bossino, because the only person that Keith Azopardi has beaten in
 an electoral competition is Damon Bossino, who is the other person who gets up to give advice to
 860 the putative leadership candidates of the GSLP – the man who has never won a leadership contest.
 Again, I am not insulting anyone, I am just referring to the record. *Está claro, no?*

How on earth does he think he is persuasive when he tells Mr Feetham what to do or Ms Arias-
 Vasquez what to do or how to behave, or that our party cares? Our party is different. We have
 leadership elections, we know what we have to do, we offer ourselves to our Members, we make
 865 the argument, and that is it. We choose, and we carry on. We are not going to require an editorial
 in the *Gibraltar Chronicle* saying settle down and get on with each other, which is what they

needed to have. If we are as out of energy, out of ideas and out of touch, as he says (**A Member:** Dysfunctional.) – and dysfunctional – how on earth did they lose? If we are just lying and creating a mirage, how on earth did they not point that out to the public? If we are lying, which we are not, have they not got the ability to show the public that we are lying? If they are that unpersuasive, let us never put them in the room to negotiate for Gibraltar. That is the reality.

Madam Speaker, if mine is a long goodbye, if I am the political carcass, what is he? He failed in 2007, he failed in 2011, he failed in 2019, he failed in 2023. I am the political carcass fighting for his political life? I have won all of these things. I won in 2011 and in 2015, in 2019 and in 2023, and said I am going. *I* am not fighting for my political life; I think *he* is the one fighting for his political relevance – that is the reality – saying one thing in this place then going outside Convent Place and saying something else to protestors, just like Mr Clinton. This is not a new political drama that is being played out, the longest leadership campaign in history – that is not true. The longest leadership campaign in history started in 2003 when he said to Peter Caruana, ‘Come on, Peter, it is time to go and for me to take over,’ and Peter Caruana said, ‘Yes, how is your coco? The sooner you go the better,’ and he left. Since then, he has been trying to be Chief Minister of Gibraltar. I am wrong, actually, and the Deputy Chief Minister, by being here, has reminded me that I am wrong. The longest leadership campaign in history started when Joe Garcia Snr, rest in peace, left the leadership of the GNP and Keith Azopardi tried to become leader of the Liberal Party and did not succeed. I had forgotten how far back it goes. If anybody is fighting for his political life, it is not me; at least I made it.

Madam Speaker, I thought it was a little bit unnecessary for hon. Members to refer to Rock Masters when referring to the Hon. Mr Santos, for a number of reasons. We are here to do a serious job and the work that Christian has done with Richard Mor in respect of maintaining Llanito culture is something which is now considered to be highly relevant and important, (**A Member:** Hear, hear.) and well done for that work. How dare he suggest that Christian Santos is typecast? Certainly not. As Mr Santos reminded him, he has played many more characters than just Rock Masters; I have the videos at home to show for it.

Mr Bossino, in his characteristically retributive style, said that he would remind Mr Feetham of the fact that he was in the GSD etc. Let’s do some reminding. Let’s remind Mr Bossino not that he was in the National Party with us many years ago; let’s remind him that in December he did not file parliamentary questions because he was having a fit of pique because he had not made leader of the party. A Parliament is called by the Government. Their obligation is to file questions. He throws his toys out of the leadership pram and does not file questions for his constituents in respect of his areas of shadow ministerial responsibility. Is that the sort of person we are supposed to be taking lessons from, that putative leadership candidates of a serious political party like the Socialist Labour Party are going to take lessons from – somebody who gets so angry because they have not chosen him as leader that he does not file questions in Parliament, and we are going to allow him to forget that he failed in his duty? The Hon. Ms Norton did not make it in January in time for the deadline to file questions. I have never failed the parliamentary deadline, but there but for the grace of God go all of us; it could happen to any of us at any time. Fair enough. But to not file, on purpose, to show his political pique showed this community who Damon Bossino is, ready to disregard his responsibility to his constituents because he was angry that he had not beaten Keith in the leadership election. I say Keith, Madam Speaker, because it did not happen here, it happened outside.

I was struck by the fact that when I got up yesterday to talk about these things, having just spent two hours talking about them Mr Bossino started to say it is not relevant. So, they can talk about the leadership of the GSLP during the course of the Appropriation debate, and yet when we get up to reply, talking about the leadership of the GSLP and the GSD, it is not relevant. That shows you the double measure which we have to suffer in the approach of hon. Members.

The Hon. Mr Bossino said that their calculation is that I am going in April 2027. I will write it down. I will make sure that my calculation and their calculation are the same, except of course I am not calculating this, it is really quite different.

920 He talked about the wolves in the GSLP. There are no wolves in the GSLP. We are all lions here on this side: lions in defending Gibraltar, lions in defending our people and lions in defending our record – that is what we have demonstrated and that is why we are back here – and lions in engaging with our people. Apparently I have lost my political mojo. What is it, I am Austin Powers all of a sudden? What is it? Are we wolves or Austin Powers? Which way are they going to take the analogies that they want to make?

925 People are fed up with us and with the Government, he said. Well, it just accentuates the fact that they must not be very good at this thing that we call politics, if people are so fed up with us and they did not beat us in the General Election, to such an extent that they do an analysis that says my speech was short and anodyne, not like before when apparently my speeches were too long and boring. So what is it? Do they want me to speak short and sharp or do they want me to speak long?

Hon. D J Bossino: You are never boring.

935 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Isn't there a very clear and obvious reality, which is that there is a pre-election Budget and there is a post-election Budget? That is a political reality. Or is it that hon. Members are going to pretend not to understand that?

940 I was struck by the fact that the hon. Gentleman said that they are learning to match our levels of toxicity. What did I say in my short and anodyne speech which was toxic? A speech which is anodyne cannot be toxic. But hon. Members have fessed up – again, this is Mr Bossino's ability sometimes to see beyond the horizon, because in saying the phrase that he said he has demonstrated that what they are up to is toxicity, just like he gave away in a moment with you, Madam Speaker, during Question Time, that they were going to attack and this was all about, now, as he said, toxicity.

945 He said those who do not want to go back in history will say it is wrong for us talk about the last time they were in government. He talked about when the Father of the House was in opposition, how Joe Bossano had used the dockyard to put pressure on Joshua Hassan in a relentless way. Well, he is forgetting his history. The battle for parity was one in which we were all united. The Government was not with the unions, but everybody now says that the unions did the right thing and hails them as those who were right, and that is the source of our prosperity. I do not think that Joe Bossano was doing anything wrong, as the Hon. Mr Bossino implied yesterday. When we were talking about the dockyard, he seems to have forgotten this was, later, about more than just parity. It was about stopping the privatisation of the dockyard. Mrs Thatcher, who he prayed in aid, was privatising the Gibraltar dockyard against the views of all the political parties in Gibraltar – Sir Joshua, Peter Isola and Joe Bossano. Or is that we have forgotten that the argument in those election campaigns was whether or not, although nobody wanted the privatisation, we should accept it and work with the UK government – the Hassan position – we should fight it and try to not have privatisation – the Bossano position – or we should try to do a better deal, which was the Isola position, which fell between the cracks? He came here yesterday and in his speech said Joe Bossano was using the unions to become Chief Minister. Oh my God, Madam Speaker, what a failure to understand history, a failure to understand even the history of the past nine months when hon. Members have said that the electorate did not get the full picture. Well, if they did not get the full picture, it was not because we lied to them, but if they say that we lied to them, which we did not, then they did not get the full picture because *they* were not able to show the reality.

960 Or is it, in fact, that what happened during the course of the last general election, which is something that I did not necessarily think was relevant to these Estimates because people want to talk about the things that matter to them, how they are going to get to the end of the week ... I sympathise with those people, I understand those people, because my parents I remember sitting at the kitchen table counting the pennies to get to the end of the week when we were paid here weekly with money in an envelope. I remember those days. That is why I have empathy for

people today. That is what people want us to talk about, not about the last election and why they lost it. In terms of empathy and cost of living, spending and public finance, they were the ones with the candidate who spent £100,000 in one phone bill, who then said it was not true and that she was going to sue. I have tabled the phone bills in this House to demonstrate that we were not misleading the public, they were. If anything was said during the course of the last general election campaign which was untrue, it was the purported defence against that reality. Or this idea that we have somehow more recently elevated their visit to the Governor after the Inquiries Bill to something that it was not, that they were not seeking direct rule or anything like that. It is obvious that they were seeking to prevent or delay consent. For what other reason did they go and see the Governor? The Hon. Mr Azopardi said, 'Because the Governor had seen you and you had shared your views with him, because the Governor said on television that you had shared views with him.' Yes, I had shared views with the Governor. The Constitution requires me to meet with the Governor and tell him what I am doing and I give him my views of what I am doing, and it requires the Governor to share his views with me, so I meet the Governor once a week, at least, if not more often. Strong bonds of friendship have joined me to all of the Governors that I have worked with beyond the professional, and I share views with Governors, but just because of that he also had to go and share views? The Constitution of the United Kingdom and Gibraltar does not work on the basis of the King seeing Rishi Sunak every week and also seeing Keir Starmer every week, when Keir Starmer was Leader of the Opposition. It works on seeing Rishi Sunak every week and Keir Starmer once in a while at a reception, perhaps once in a while for lunch and, today, to make him Prime Minister. Even then, if I had shared views with a Governor about a Bill before the Bill was debated in this House, and I had said so and the Governor had said so, and he wanted to share views with the Governor about that Bill, I would have thought that that was normal *before* the debate in this House, but once you have come to the debate in this House you have shared your views with everyone, including the Governor, because this is the place, the Parliament – the word 'parliament' comes from 'parley': debate, speak, talk – where we share our views. He had shared his views with everyone. Did he go to see David Steel to repeat the things that he had said here? Why? Vice Admiral Sir David Steel had watched the debate on television. He was assiduous in making sure that he knew what was happening in Parliament. There was no need for that. Transparently, what they were trying to do was interfere with consent.

The battle for decolonisation and self-government has been won jointly at every stage. Here, they peeled away from the rest of us. The Hon. Mr Bossino says, 'But the expert, the Hon. Mr Azopardi, has written a book about it, so how can you pretend that he was doing something wrong? Quite the opposite.' No, the book he has written, *Sovereignty and the Stateless Nation*, is the one that reaches the conclusion that Andorra is not joint sovereignty, Madam Speaker. Let's leave it at that, because for somebody in this day and age to say we are supported by truth and veracity ... This is back to the days of the Crusades where only they tell the truth, back to the days of St Peter's chair, back to the good old GSD days, the days when, when a Government makes a mistake, when a Chief Minister makes a mistake, he does not say, 'I am sorry, I made a mistake, I will change course,' he doubles down regardless of the damage. Well, those days are gone.

I am always going to be amused by the Hon. Mr Bossino or Mr Azopardi talking about the fact that they are the largest party in this House because the Liberals have two, we have seven and they have eight. They are starting now not just to take the ideological positions of Partido Popular and Vox on issues like abortion etc., they are starting to sound like Partido Popular politicians. It was famously Mr Feijóo who said, doing the investiture ceremony debate in the Spanish Parliament, that he was not President of the Spanish government because he did not want to be, because he is the largest party, just like them.

In that context, going back to the general election campaign – which is what they wanted to do, because that is what they have done in the context of the debate, relitigate the general election campaign which has already been decided – I found it very difficult to understand how he thought he was going to stay on the board whilst surfing at No. 6 Convent Place on the backs of all of those people who were there with genuine concerns, because he was the politician in the

1025 leaders' debate and in his manifesto who had failed to rule out tax rises. There are people saying,
 'We want the Minimum Wage to go up more,' and they are the ones saying the Chamber is right,
 which means that they are saying the Minimum Wage has gone up too much. They are the ones
 saying the Chamber is right – that is to say the public sector is already costing too much, so do not
 put the salaries up. And they are the ones saying tax might have to go up instead of down. They
 are saying the opposite of the things that the protestors at Convent Place were concerned about,
 so what were they doing with the protestors at No. 6 Convent Place? Making common cause about
 1030 an alleged enemy in me or my Government, I assume. Those protestors do not have an enemy in
 us, they have a listening ear and we will be reaching out to them and hopefully working with them
 to continue to ameliorate the cost-of-living crisis on the public.

1035 Madam Speaker, I do not see anybody flying around my political carcass, because I do not see
 a political carcass. I know *que me he quedado en el chasis*, as the saying goes in Spanish when one
 loses a lot of weight, but a chassis does not a carcass make. Far from it, I feel much more energetic
 as a result of the weight loss, far more energetic.

I do not know if, for the first time, hon. Members actually sought to work together on their
 Budget speeches. We usually see them go out in different directions, but this time, in one
 particular regard, they seem to be quite joined up. Mr Azopardi and Mr Bossino made common
 1040 cause, for once. It was all about attacking potential GSLP leadership candidates, to such an extent
 that Mr Feetham was accused of the heinous offence of meeting constituents and businesses that
 are his responsibility in his ministerial office –

1045 **Hon. N Feetham:** With a jumper! (*Interjection*)

Hon. Chief Minister: 'What are you doing meeting so many people, like the normal, ordinary
campechano guy that you are?' I think that this is not about whether or not it is one potential
 leadership candidate in the GSLP or another. They are not looking at that. What came across is
 their concern that whether it is one or the other – or the other or the other, or the other or the
 1050 other, or the other or the other – whoever is the next leader of the GSLP Liberals at the next
 general election is more credible than any of *them* in leadership at the next general election. In a
 jumper or in a suit jacket, that is the reality. That is what they were concerned about. That is why,
 at last, they came together and said, '*aquí hay que atacar*' – 'We have to attack because they are
 doing really quite well. We need to push them into staying in ivory towers and not meeting people.
 1055 They are meeting people. That is a bad thing. That is what we want to do. That is the surfing that
 we want to do.'

Not allowing Mr Feetham to forget the things that he did seems to me to be very lazy politics.
 I do not think Mr Feetham has forgotten the things that he did; he is probably very proud of them.
 As he said at the time of the general election campaign, blood runs thicker than water. He was
 1060 supporting his brother, something which we have all respected when we co-opted him into the
 GSLP executive. Does Mr Bossino think we have forgotten those things when we co-opted him?
 We co-opted him because he explained to us that he was supporting his brother, he explained to
 us his ideology, he explained to us what he wanted to do in ministerial office if he was selected to
 become a Minister; and we selected him not because of some sort of collective amnesia. There is
 1065 no need to remind us of any of that. There is no need for that. There was a demonstration of
 commitment to one's brother. That is what socialism is about: commitment to one's brother. So,
 we will welcome Mr Bossino reminding us of that; it might actually give a fillip to Mr Feetham's
 leadership campaign, if he runs one, because it is a demonstration of loyalty and commitment,
 nothing else.

1070 Then the Hon. Mr Bossino falls into the trap of saying, 'Ah, but because Mr Feetham was in the
 executive of the GSD before 2011, and you, Mr Picardo, have said that Mr Feetham' – the other
 Feetham – 'did dastardly deeds in No. 6 Convent Place, then you are saying that Mr Nigel Feetham
 also did dastardly deeds.' Well, I do not accept that, because one thing is what you do in the
 ministerial office and quite another thing is what we do as a party; it is a different thing. But in

1075 that case, they who were all in the executive of the GSD can no longer pretend that the GSD
Government had nothing to do with them, no? They spend a lot of time saying, 'We were just in
the executive; I was not in the Government,' but now, for Mr Feetham, he has to be stuck with
the actions of the GSD Government whilst the GSD exonerates itself of the actions of the GSD
Government. This is worse than nonsense, Madam Speaker.

1080 Then they turn to the Hon. Ms Arias-Vasquez and say she is the chosen one but she has no time
because she has such a big portfolio. Well, a big portfolio that, as she told the House, the hon.
Lady had asked for and, as she started her speech by saying, she had spent the general election
campaign saying that she wanted for the reasons that she movingly explained to the House and
during the course of her speech in February at the Mackintosh Hall.

1085 Then they say, in trying to stir it, that the Hon. John Cortes, who was not here, may also harbour
leadership ambitions, and if I have not said that he might be leader then he might be disappointed
because he wants to be leader. I do not have to say that anybody wants to be leader. Our
constitution says if you want to be leader, whenever the post comes up – there does not even
have to be a vacancy, you can perfectly challenge the guy who is there – you put your name
1090 forward. You do not have to be told that you want to do it or not do it. Maybe they will say the
Father of the House will want to do it. Well, there are two gentlemen, younger than the Father of
the House, less obviously cognitively able than the Father of the House, who are vying to become
leaders of the free world in November. So, if the Father of the House wanted to become leader of
the party that he founded, who could say that he would not be an excellent candidate for the job?
1095 He has more cognitive ability than the man who is going to have his finger on the button to blow
up the whole world in the flames that JFK told us we might all be consumed by. But why, in all of
that, didn't he refer to Pat Orfila or Christian Santos? Why? Is that the misogynist element once
again coming through? Or is it the homophobia coming through? Which of the two is it, I ask
myself. In my view, every single one of the GSLP Members of this Parliament would make excellent
1100 leaders of the GSLP, each of them better than me. I would support any of them who became leader
to become the next Chief Minister of Gibraltar above any of *them*, certainly above the two who
have been vying for it, who are well known not to be very good at winning elections or being very
persuasive.

Then, to hear Mr Bossino talk about the little courtesy and etiquette that is extended to them
1105 because I do not tell them when the debate is going to be ... Well look, we had a ding-dong across
the floor of the House. I told them when the debate was going to be shortly after I told Members
of the Cabinet – or, indeed, shortly after I decided *with* Members of the Cabinet when the debate
was going to be. I told them when the reply was going to be hours after I was asked by the Leader
of the Opposition – all of which is movable, not because of us but because of them – because we
1110 talk to each other, we think about what we are going to say, who is going to say what, who is going
to take this, who is going to take that, '*Tu que vas a tardar*', how long are you going to take, but
we do not know how long *they* are going to take. They could have taken as long as they wanted.
Ms Norton ... Ms Sanchez – the reason I say 'Norton' will become apparent in a minute, and I am
sorry. The Hon. Ms Sanchez and the Hon. Mr Sacarello could have spoken for three hours each,
1115 Mr Origo could have spoken for two hours yesterday, and Mr Bossino has treated us to longer
speeches than the one that he did yesterday – always animated, always illogical, always long – so,
we might not have been able to do the reply today.

Madam Speaker, I *fully* empathise with the position put by the Hon. Ms Ladislaus about
1120 childcare. I have childcare issues myself; I have them today as a single parent. I fully understand,
but the parliamentary timetable, which is already much more set out than it ever has been before,
subject to the vicissitudes of Government changing us, is very difficult unless we get to the stage
where we agree – as the Leader of the Opposition and I were almost going to agree with you,
Madam Speaker, at one stage – that we put times on. If we say questions on education or, in the
hon. Lady's example, questions on health will be on the third Wednesday between four and five,
1125 then that is it, but we have to finish by five, not then get caught with – usually not her, Madam
Speaker, with respect – another Member getting up and saying – usually the Hon. Mr Bossino or

1130 Mr Clinton – ‘I want to go into this in more detail, in more detail, in more detail and in more detail,’
and then we start talking about the Savings Bank and having all the same arguments we have
always had, again. Then, which it is their right to do, we are here until 8.30 with only eight
questions done, when we arrived at four, and we are not curtailing their ability to ask
supplementaries. It is a simple choice. I am up for it, Madam Speaker. I am up for putting times
and for trying to work it out. The Leader of the Opposition knows that and we discussed that
possibility. I was trying to see how it played out to try and get the times.

1135 We did not know when a House was going to be called or *if* a House was going to be called,
when any debate was going to be had. The first thing the Father of the House said to me when he
was Leader of the Opposition and we got the Appropriation Act 2004-05 was, ‘You need to read
this, you need to be ready. We do not know when the debate will be. He could call it at any time.’
Sir Peter *might* sometimes tell us when he was going to take the debate. So, the idea that we are
not somehow courteous and dealing with hon. Members with etiquette I think is a failure to
1140 understand the mechanics of Parliament as they are today, which I agree we need to fix and make
better, and a failure to demonstrate how they acted.

The most remarkable thing when the Hon. Mr Azopardi got into the substance of his speech –
the bit that felt like a long, long homily on a wet Sunday morning in a church – was this question
of the overspend in the GHA. Once again, he was making the point that the overspend in the GHA
1145 was our responsibility, and this time he broke it down. He said it is not the responsibility of the
estimator who might get the estimate wrong, it is not the responsibility of the clerk who is doing
the work, it is not the responsibility of the person who is making the payments; it is the
responsibility of the Minister. Well, I think we can all agree, for once. It is the responsibility of the
Minister. That is why we say we come here to defend politically the overspends and the numbers.
1150 It is remarkable that he should say that, for two reasons. First of all, they are the ones who talk
about a Public Accounts Committee and wanting to bring civil servants here, to make them
responsible for the overspends and cross-examine them, which is what happens in the select
committee. They want to humiliate civil servants, asking them about every single penny, which is
what happens in select committees. You just have to see how the Permanent Under Secretary of
1155 the Foreign Office was dealt with in the context of the withdrawal from Kabul to see what it is like
when you go to a select committee to be quizzed as a civil servant about your areas of
responsibility, in particular when it comes to money. That is what they want. We say no, it is a
ministerial responsibility. Well, Mr Azopardi seems to agree with us. It is ministerial responsibility,
okay?

1160 His speech this year was a carbon copy of his speech from last year, the mirage speech that he
gave last year. Didn’t he hear the answer? I told him last year how the GSD overspends had been
higher in Health in their time than in our time. I set it all out in detail. GHA expenditure under the
GSD went from £22.4 million in 1997-98 to £87.245 million in 2011-12. Sir Joe Bossano could not
resist and got up and said – well did not get up, said from a sedentary position – they boasted it
1165 was a good thing. Then I took him through each of the increases and, not just the increases in the
Budget, the overspend each year in the Budget. I showed him the overspends in the Budget in the
years that he was Minister for Health. They were higher then than they were last year, and they
were higher then than they are this year. He overspent by more than the hon. Lady has overspent,
if she has overspent, but by his analysis because it is her ministerial responsibility. Well, look, if it
1170 is her ministerial responsibility and she has overspent by less than when it was his ministerial
responsibility, who is a better custodian of the public finances in relation to health? Her. Us. We.

Madam Speaker, it is all set out. I am not going to do what he did, which is to read into this
year’s *Hansard* last year’s *Hansard* as a proposition to prove that I am right. In other words, he did
that thing which we lawyers call the ‘Denning trick’ of going back to something you said in another
1175 case, even though it was *obiter*, that is to say it is not what helps you decide the case, even though
it was not in the majority, and quote yourself as your proposition. He quoted his speech of last
year without quoting my reply which demonstrated that everything that he had said was wrong.
The Hon. Mr Azopardi, as Minister for Health, overspent his budget by more, in percentage terms,

1180 than any GSLP Minister for Health has overspent their budget, in particular in respect of sponsored
patients and in particular in respect of the capital expenditure of the GHA. I must say, Madam
1185 Speaker, this is a particularly well-argued part of my debate last year. I would love to read it out
to you, but I think you have better things to do, and I am sure that you will catch up on that old
Hansard during your summer reading in order to have confirmed that whether it is on the GPMS
budget, the capital budget, the overall budget of the GHA or the sponsored patients budget, the
1190 Ministers – because they say it is Ministers – who have the biggest responsibility for the highest
overspends are GSD Ministers. Well, if it is bad when it happens in our time and they did it worse,
they must be worse stewards of that budget, that is to say of that part of the administration of
the public finances of Gibraltar that we are talking about right now.

And then, in the context of that, he says, ‘That is why you have to change Ministers.’ Oh yes,
1195 because the only way to deal with the GHA budget is to change Ministers. Well, that is the
consequence (*Interjection by Hon. Dr K Azopardi*) – the hon. Gentleman says he did not say that –
of what he said. He does not think through the things that he says. If it is the responsibility of the
Minister, then the Minister is the problem – except that he was, in that analysis, a bigger problem.
We have changed Ministers for Health in Gibraltar since we have had a Health Authority many
1200 times. I think apart from one year when John Cortes, in the first year, was Minister for Health, no
Minister for Health has ever brought the Health Authority in on budget because it is demand led
and because things change. We must work to deliver it on budget. His analysis is painfully shallow.
When he says then that we failed in our promise to halve debt, he is comparing a 2011 apple with
a 2023 pear, despite the fact that the anvil of £500 million of COVID debt fell in between. We get
1205 debt at £517 million, we get it down to about £300 million or £400 million, we are getting it down,
and then COVID comes and it goes up. Of course we are, today, not where we wanted to be. We
did not want COVID and we did not want the COVID debt, but we all agreed we should take it.
That is the reality.

In all of this context, the hon. Member was outside Convent Place on Monday despite saying
1210 he is going to raise taxes, despite saying that he is going to keep the cost of the public sector
down – that is to say, not put up public sector salaries – despite saying, from Mr Clinton’s or the
other Mr Feetham’s mouth, that the public sector was bloated, the Civil Service was bloated. And
yet they are there. At the same time as the people are crying out for more in terms of the public
sector pay rise, he is saying, ‘The pay rise that you gave last year, the support payment that you
1215 gave the public sector, was just an electoral-driven payment.’ He is saying we should not have
given it. How on earth is he associating himself with people who say that we should have given
more? He is saying it was an electoral bung when we are saying it was needed by people at that
time in that way and the unions agreed.

I do not accept that we have told any tall tales, whether it is about being 99% there with the
1220 treaty or anything else. To say that we are telling tall tales, to say that we are misleading – and he
is confirming that that is what he said – is to say that we have lied. We have never lied to the
people of Gibraltar. We will never lie to the people of Gibraltar. We consider our obligation to tell
the people of Gibraltar the truth to be an obligation which is sacrosanct. We have *never* failed that
test. In politics it is very easy to talk in a way that is pejorative, but we take this very seriously. But
1225 now people know we were certainly telling the truth when we said that one of their candidates
had incurred a £100,000 debt to Gibtelecom in one phone bill. They said it was not true, but it
was, so if anybody failed the test of truth during the last general election, it is now demonstrated
that it was them, not us. I do not want to do a postmortem of the last general election here,
because we won it and there is no need for it. There is no bitterness on our part; it is all on theirs.

We do not preside over a secretive Government, we do not lie, and there is no festering swamp
of conflicts. What there is, is a clear demonstration of our commitment to transparency: in the
Book, in this process, in the fact that everything is online, and in the inquiry. It is that clear.
Everything has been put in the public domain, except where something does not exist because
1230 where something does not exist you cannot publish it and you cannot give it, because it does not
exist.

I have found it absolutely remarkable to see the tarnishing of somebody as, in my view, full of integrity and commitment to Gibraltar as Peter Montegriffo, the founder of the GSD, a Deputy Chief Minister of the GSD, a colleague of Mr Azopardi as Ministers between 1996 and 2000 now finding himself tarnished by association with me by the Opposition. They say that because I have appointed him – I took a note of the fact that that is what Mr Bossino said: ‘You have appointed him,’ – he is now tarnished because he is a member, also, of Hassans. It is a little bit tiresome to have to explain to the Hon. Mr Bossino how appointments under the Police Act work. I do not appoint anyone. The Governor appoints after the interview process and recommendation of the specified Appointments Commission. I have nothing to do with the appointment. They check with me if it is okay for the name to go forward. Neither is it a proposal from the current Governor, who does not know Peter Montegriffo, does not know Keith Azopardi and does not know Fabian Picardo and is simply floundering for a name, and I – in a dastardly way, as they suggested in their press release – allow them to put one of my partners from Hassans as the nominee for this job. No, it is done by Sir David Steel, who knows all of the inside-out of the inquiry, Hassans, TSN, Fabian Picardo, Keith Azopardi, Damon Bossino, Joe Bossano and everybody else, and still thinks he is the right candidate. And yet, when they have that pointed out to them they still insist. There would not be a GSD if it were not for Peter Montegriffo. That is the reality. It demonstrates that hon. Members opposite know no bounds when it comes to casting aspersions, and I am grateful that they have demonstrated that in a way that is clear.

As for the *New People*, I have had absolutely nothing to do with the writing of any article in respect of the current Commissioner or the former Commissioner. I have had nothing to do with any writing in the *New People* to do with the inquiry. That will be confirmed to the inquiry. Indeed, because I do not have time, I have not even read those articles. The only politician who has admitted in this House to writing in somebody else’s name was not me, it was the other Mr Feetham, who said that he used to write on Facebook in the name of Mr Michael Bane. I have written in the *New People* many times, but the Hon. Mr Azopardi prays in aid, for some of the propositions that he wants to advance, the *Guardian*. In the *Guardian*, journalists frequently write without a byline – also in the *Financial Times*, sometimes in the *Times* and in the *Economist* – so the fact that in the *New People* articles appear without a byline is as nefarious, improper and wrong as it is in the *Guardian*, the *Independent*, the *Financial Times* and the *Economist*.

I have written in the *New People*, Madam Speaker. I wrote a very good series in the *New People* called ‘Peter the Python’. It was so good that the editor of the *New People* kindly each year extracted what I wrote and gave it to me as an annual. In 2001 it was particularly good. One of the articles that I wrote – then anonymously because in a GSD Gibraltar if you put your name to something you were prone to finding yourself in a very difficult situation – was an article entitled Planet of the Tapes. Planet of the Tapes, based on *Planet of the Apes*, was about an episode in our history when the hon. Gentleman was Deputy Chief Minister – and, therefore, on the basis of Mr Bossino’s analysis, certainly part of the Government that did what I am about to refer to now – had provided to them a recording of the private telephone conversations of the then Leader of the Opposition, which they published.

Sometimes it is important that you be able to express a view without putting your name to it. I have not done so in relation to any article to do with the McGrail Inquiry or the current Commissioner of Police in the *New People* – I will take an oath in that respect, if I have to – but I have written in the past not in my name. Of course, I am not the only politician in Gibraltar to have done that. The *New People* is not the only party political publication there has been. There was one called *The Gibraltarian*. In *The Gibraltarian* there was a grossly antisemitic article which once appeared called ‘The Lamentations or Contradictions of Joseph’. I have a very good idea of who wrote that quite disgusting article which on any other occasion would have resulted in a successful libel action in the way that it characterised the Hon. Dr Garcia. I think that person is sitting in this House and I think that person was in the GSD then.

Madam Speaker, nobody on this side is bitter or angry. The hon. Gentleman is talking about the mote in his own eye. What concerns me is that having been a political failure for so long,

1285 having failed to win an election in 2007, in 2011, in 2019 and in 2023, the hon. Gentleman's
desperation now knows no bounds, and even if damage is done to Gibraltar, which is what we
have seen in the way that they dealt with the issue of the Inquiries Act, they will continue to
pursue any aspect of their campaign that they think will enable them to succeed. Therefore, the
only entity drowning in its own contradictions is the party opposite under hon. Members, because
1290 on the one hand they talk about joining with the Chamber and the GFSB in their analysis, and on
the other hand they try to make common cause with those who think the Minimum Wage should
go up. On the one hand they talk about putting tax up, and then they go and protest with those
who think that tax should have come down by more. That is the morass of contradictions that we
are dealing with. That is why hon. Members will never gain leverage with people who have a
genuine problem, who are reaching out to the Government.

1295 The one thing they cannot do is pretend that they are the ones who would never put up water
and electricity, because water and electricity had never gone up for 30 years until they put it up.
The GSD put it up, and if Mr Feetham is fixed by being in the executive or with the actions of the
GSD Government, then Mr Bossino is fixed with the actions of the GSD Government. I do not know
whether Mr Clinton was in the executive at the time. They put up water and electricity, so how
can he stand with people who are complaining about water and electricity going up by 0.004p
1300 when they put it up by a lot more in the years that they put it up? It is remarkable.

Madam Speaker, let's do the analysis. They were the first ones to raise water and electricity
for 30 years. On an average wage of, say, £30,000 you are about £420 better off with the
consolidation of the £1,200 and 2.6% inflation. That is without counting overtime, shift
disturbance and all the other allowances. One per cent less tax is about £300 a year, so £720 better
1305 off. Social Insurance, water and electricity will be a total of about £133, so you are likely to be
about £600 *at least* better off; and there is no way that 0.004% on electricity is going to eat that
up, so we are not giving with one hand and taking with the other. So, the hopeless fiction – which
is what the Hon. Leader of the Opposition used as the theme of his speech – is what the hon.
Gentleman has tried to do. I do not know whether he fed his speech into ChatGPT to try to make
1310 it more relevant, but to repeat last year's speech in almost exactly the same way ... It is a new art
form to come here and quote your speech from last year for this year. And he complains that
Joe Bossano answers the speeches from the year before. At least he answers the speeches of the
year before; he does not read his speech from the year before. In fact, I think the poor man has
given up addressing them on these issues and spoke for less this time because however many
1315 times he explains the economy and public finances of Gibraltar to them they make the same
mistakes every year. At least I only make the same mistake once. 'I am not blaming civil servants,'
he says, 'no, I am blaming the Government.' Yes, I write every cheque. It is remarkable, absolutely
remarkable. At least the Hon. Leader of the Opposition demonstrated to us all why he was not
able to win the last general election against a Government he said was eminently beatable, there
1320 for the taking, and yet he did not make it.

Madam Speaker, I am conscious that I started at 11 o'clock and I have kept you for two and a
half hours. I have a little bit still to go through and I wonder whether this might be a convenient
moment to allow you and the Clerk, who are the only ones who cannot move in and out whilst
the speeches are ongoing – and, dare I say it, me – at least the opportunity for a short comfort
1325 break, and then we should come back in 15 minutes, at quarter to two.

Madam Speaker: We will recess for 15 minutes until quarter to two.

The House recessed at 1.30 p.m. and resumed its sitting at 1.45 p.m.

**Appropriation Bill 2024 —
Second Reading —
Debate continued**

Madam Speaker: Yes, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

1330 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, thank you I am heartened to see that the King has asked Mr Starmer to form a Government. He is now outside the stairs of Downing Street explaining to the British people the Agenda that he brings to the United Kingdom.

I was just finishing off with the contribution from the Hon. Mr Azopardi. I do recall that he said during the course of his intervention that I am somehow seeking the shroud of the protection of the GSD. The religious analogy is not lost on me by somehow working with Peter Montegriffo and with Sir Peter Caruana. Madam Speaker far from it, the Hon. Gentleman knows that when he was not a shroud because he was not in the GSD he was out of the PDP, the Party that he formed and was not able to lead to Government that I actually asked him to represent the Government too although he had been a political opponent. He represented us in the context of the other enquiry, the Hernandez enquiry and he represented us in preparing a blueprint on Constitutional reform as well. Indeed, we were in negotiations for him to become Solicitor General although we could not agree with the fee that he was proposing. So I do not seek shrouds Madam Speaker, I regard people as professionals despite our political differences and that is how I work with people and hon. Members know that I am good at working with people even if I have a political disagreement. I find it more difficult, of course Madam Speaker, to work with someone if they start by telling me that my work, as the Hon. Mr Clinton did, has been written to deceive. That is a suggestion which I think skirts the rules but those are a matter for you not for me, that the contribution I gave in my Second Reading presentation of the Estimates Bill, the Appropriation Bill, is somehow misleading the House which it is not. It is actually quite unfair and quite untrue because the Estimates are not prepared by Ministers.

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To come back to this lazy chestnut that the Hon. Leader of the Opposition came up with, the Estimates are prepared by officials in each Department, who submit them to the Ministry for Finance, who work with them by challenging them in order to get to those right numbers, and then I present them. So, Madam Speaker, I think it is very unfair to say that somehow anything that was said here in the context of the Second Reading by me is written to deceive.

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The hon. Member then talked about a pseudo-socialist Chief Minister. This is an important point and it is a particularly important point right now as a knight of the realm stands on the steps of Downing Street to become Prime Minister, leading probably the most successful socialist party in the world, the Labour Party of the United Kingdom. Socialists do not have to be poor. Socialists do not have to be underachieving. The Hon. Father of the House, when he conceived of the graduate scheme, the scheme where every Gibraltarian would be funded to go away to university, did not say, 'And when you come back from university with a law degree you are not permitted to continuing membership of the Socialist Party because you will then be successful. You might, perish the thought, become a professional who earns considerable amounts of money through your hard work and endeavour, and we the Socialist Party will no longer want anything to do with you because you cannot be a socialist if you do well.' Quite the opposite is the case. What we bank on is people working hard, taking the opportunities, doing well and providing for their families, and in that way not having to rely on the state. This socialist Chief Minister does not rely on the state for the things that he can do for himself and for his family, but this Chief Minister is very proud to be a socialist, regardless of the car I might drive, the profession I may have had the honour of discharging when I was not Chief Minister and the work that may have led me to that to be able to purchase my own home and a vehicle. I will not succumb to the trap of the right wing that only they can be successful and only they can drink alcohol that happens to have bubbles. It is an utter nonsense. It is ideologically foolish to suggest that because a person is successful they can no longer wear the red rosette.

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There is no 'pseudo' element to my socialism or my leadership of the party or indeed my leadership of the community, but there must be a pseudo element to his and his party's attempt, and the Hon. Mr Clinton's attempt, to suggest that they somehow represent working people, because – and I do not tire of making the analysis – you cannot say that you associate with working people who are complaining about the effects of the Budget when you are saying you would have put their tax up potentially by more, and when you are saying that the Chamber is right when the Chamber is saying that the Minimum Wage has gone up by too much and they want the Minimum Wage put up more. That is to be pseudo-representative of the working classes. That is to try to pull the wool over people's eyes, pretend that you represent them and not represent them. There is no shame in representing that point of view. If they believe that the Chamber is right, that the Minimum Wage is too high, that the public sector salaries are too high, they should say so. There is a niche for that in politics. Christian democracy would very adequately describe what most of them think. Conservatism, that is fine, there is no crime in being a conservative – we have had a conservative Government very successfully for 14 years – but they should say so. They should not pretend – and this is the thing that gets me about Conservatives in most places – they should not pretend to represent working people; they should proudly represent the entrepreneurs who want lower tax, lower Minimum Wage, lower public sector salaries. They should do it. They should say that is what we are doing.

We believe that we represent those people too, because we believe those people believe in a fair representation of the wealth of the community, but they spend their time trying to jump into our shoes and pretend that they are the socialists, that they are the representatives of the working class, not us. We happen to be successful representatives of the working class. I do not say that they are not working people. In modern life today we are all workers. In the fact of Gibraltar as it was, they were all the children of working parents just like I am, but they chose a different ideology. They chose the ideology of the right wing. They kissed goodbye to who they were. They have decided to represent what they wanted to become. That is fine, but just do not pretend that we are not who we are. Some of them come from families of entrepreneurs. That is something to be proud of, that is good, but do not pretend that you are something else, because frankly it is so shallow as to be worthy of description as a political sandbank and it makes no logical ideological sense to say that we are pseudo-socialists just because I have been successful in my professional life.

If anybody asked for a blueprint of what a socialist government would have done in Gibraltar, whoever it might have been led by, if it was doing things in a socialist way it would probably replace all the aging schools, it would probably provide new health facilities, it would probably increase the size of the public sector and it would increase the salaries of public sector workers. It would probably increase the Minimum Wage every year, not just at election time. It would probably increase disability benefits every year, not just at election time. That is exactly what we have done, so in the hon. Member's economic analysis – because he is the one who is doing the shadow public finance brief and he is doing the economic analysis – he should be saying, 'They are too socialist; they are behaving exactly like socialists and that is the problem, and that is why we want you to get rid of them,' not that we are pseudo-socialists, because that pretends that we are saying we are socialists and we are not doing the socialist things. We are doing the socialist things with knobs on, because we have also done the sporting facilities and we have done more affordable homes than any Government has ever done. These are the things that define us as socialists. This idea that we have somehow failed our ideology because we are successful is just nonsense. They can make these false hares run against me and then people might believe that I have villas in Portugal, which apparently is one of the things that I have and demonstrates how corrupt I am. It may demonstrate that it is true that this false *Forbes* article that says that I am worth £60 million, which people circulate to each other – (**A Member:** Sixty million?) yes, I know, £60 million, *ya ves tu, aqui iba estar yo!* (*Laughter and interjections*) – is somehow true, but, as I said before and hesitate to say it again, I can afford the Porsche because it is £160 a month; I

would not be able to afford it otherwise. We make these hares run and they denigrate all of us and poison the well for all of us.

1430 The classical thing to do, what they should be doing, is attacking me as a classic socialist – too
 much investment, which is what they really say. When the Hon. Mr Clinton says, ‘I cannot see
 where you are spending the money,’ he is not talking about the Estimates Book, he is not saying
 he cannot find it there; he is saying he is blind. Can’t he see the new schools? Has he not seen the
 Children’s Primary Care Centre? Has he not seen the new Primary Care Centre? Has he not, as the
 1435 Hon. Pat Orfila said, come out of the Kingsway Tunnel – which, by the way, we also had to pay for;
 they commissioned it but we had to pay for it – and seen the magnificent sight that she alludes to
 that will forever remind them, when they come into Gibraltar, of the Socialist Liberal Government
 that I lead, which is Hassan Centenary Terraces? They turn and find themselves at Beach View
 Terraces. They keep going and they get to the new comprehensive schools. That is where the
 money is. It is not in a villa in Portugal, for goodness sake, it is not out of the Estimates Book; it is
 1440 there, in bricks and mortar for the benefit of our people, in particular working people who, if they
 did not have the best schools in Europe provided by the Government, would not be able to afford
 to send their children privately to the best schools in Europe, which is what the rich can do and
 our people cannot. *(Banging on desks)* That is where the money is. It is obvious. The sporting
 facilities cost a fair penny, too. We have an Olympic-size swimming pool halfway up the Rock of
 1445 Gibraltar and a new athletics pitch overlooking a new rugby field, which is now being done by
 football, with a new sporting facility which we are told has one of the best squash facilities in
 Europe. The attack should be, ‘Why are you building the best in Europe? Can’t you build something
 provincial? Isn’t that enough?’ But then the attack would have to be, ‘You are too much of what
 you say you are. You are the real deal. You are the socialists that are putting up the Minimum
 1450 Wage, and we want you to put it up less because that is what the Chamber says and that is who
 we agree with. You are building too many schools; we want you to build less. Let the children
 continue in the decrepit conditions of the comprehensives they were in when we were in
 government. Be less socialist.’ Not ‘Be pseudo socialist’. There is no pseudo-socialism about this.
 This is actually pure, undiluted, modern socialism delivered for our people. Our people say, ‘It is
 1455 not enough, because we are feeling the pinch. Times are hard.’ That is the dilemma for the
 socialist, because the socialist must never fall into the trap of making the books unbalanced and
 giving more when there is not more to give. We have to hold back, to make sure that we build up
 the kitty again to be able to give more in the future, even if we suffer more now, so that our
 children have more in the future. That is the reality. But there is no pseudo-socialism, far from it:
 1460 pure, unadulterated, textbook socialism, and that is what they do not like.

In the time that they were in government they made no investment in the comprehensive
 schools. As I have said to this House before, I knew I had to invest in the comprehensive schools
 because I stepped into Bayside and it was identical to the day when I had left 30 years before,
 with my name still on the board as head boy. *(Interjection)* Of course I was head boy. *(Interjections)*
 1465 Madam Speaker, the Hon. Mr Bossino still shows the bitterness that he had with the fact that he
 was not the one appointed head boy 30 years ago, *(Banging on desks)* but people do not care
 about that; people care about the fact that they cannot make ends meet. They do not want to talk
 about whether Mr Bossino or I was head boy. I am giving the analogy that the school had not
 changed and we had to invest it, and he wants to talk about who was head boy. That is what they
 1470 want to talk about. *(Interjections)*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Hon. D J Bossino: He mentioned it.

1475

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, if it helps, I too believe that he would have won that
 election if he had fought it, and when we were in Mount Alvernia I will tell him he would have
 won the 2011 election if he had been the leader, if he likes, but what matters today to people is

1480 that they cannot make ends meet despite the investment in new schools, despite the investment
in new sporting facilities, everything that we have done. Despite putting up the Minimum Wage
every year and the pension every year and putting all of these things up, people still cannot make
ends meet. That is the dilemma for the Government and that is what is driving people to the
streets. That relates to inflation primarily, which is not something the Government can control.
1485 One of the things that people say to me is, 'But why don't you control inflation?' Well, because
inflation in Gibraltar is not actually controllable in Gibraltar. Inflation in Gibraltar comes from the
price of oil, and the price of oil comes from the war in Ukraine and the effect in the United
Kingdom; the two main economies that influence us, Spain and the UK, and inflation there, and
the interest rate. That is why we cannot do more, but we will try to do more. We are listening to
people. We hear what they say and we want to do more.

1490 Their criticism of us is not that we are not doing enough; their criticism of us – if anybody is
discerning enough to read it – is that we are doing too much, that we have invested too much in
our community, in our schools, in our health facilities, in our homes, in our public servants. That
is the reality. That is the wool that they attempt to pull over people's eyes and that is what I will
never tire of showing people, because whoever leads the Socialist Party – I hope always in alliance
1495 with our Liberal colleagues – is a better option for this community than whoever leads the Social
Democratic Party, that is not a socialist party.

Madam Speaker, I am not going to go again through the issue of the contributions to
companies which would have denuded their surpluses if we applied the standard to them that he
has applied to us. We have issued a press release on it. It cannot be explained better than it was
1500 explained by the Father of the House in this place and in the press release. They have countered
it with the same tired arguments. We are very clear. I said in this House we would do it going
forward when we had a surplus; if we do not have a surplus, we do not do it. That is the reality
and that is what they did. Again, if it was right when they did it, why is it wrong when we do it?
This is really having a double measure; a measure that works when they are the ones who are
1505 acting and is bad when we are the ones who are acting. The remarkable thing is that the
Hon. Mr Clinton was hoist by his own petard, because by putting up those pages of the Estimates
Book on Facebook, what he was showing was that we were doing, as the Hon. Father of the House
demonstrated, exactly the same thing which they did, which they say led to the best management
of the public finances, which Mr Bossino said is the golden legacy of the GSD. So, there could be
1510 no better way of saying to hon. Members what you said actually is what we did, and therefore
how can you complain?

On Community Care, it is quite something to hear Mr Clinton say what he says when they were
the ones who gave Community Care £6 million direct from the Social Insurance Fund in the year
that the Father of the House explained his views about how that was actually not the right way to
1515 proceed with supporting that independent charity and its trustees.

I have dealt already with his arguments as to taxation but I do hope he goes back to the drawing
board and does remind himself that it was the GSD that taxed the rich less and that the Socialist
Party – not the pseudo-socialist party, the Socialist Party – with the Liberals changed that so that
those who receive more pay, pay more in tax now. That is an empirical fact. All hon. Members
1520 opposite should familiarise themselves so that they know the reality of what the tax rates were
before and what they are now. The rich paid less under the GSD. The rich paid 18% on anything
over £500,000 whilst everybody else paid 25% under the GSD. Now everybody pays 25%. The rich
paid 5% when it got to over £1 million under the GSD. Now the rich pay 25% when it gets to over
£1 million. It is not fair for them to try to pretend otherwise to the people. It is not fair for them
1525 to pretend that they are not the ones who taxed the rich less.

Madam Speaker, one of the things the hon. Gentleman asked me was, 'Where is the
£10 million that was paid in respect of the *Sullivan* case, that the Care Agency had to pay? It is not
in the Book. Why is it not in the Book? Another demonstration that you have cooked the figures.'
Except that the proposed arrangements were circulated to us on 2nd May. That is to say the
1530 £10 million had to be paid after the financial year and after the closure of the Book, and that is

when the order was made and we were told that we had the obligation to pay it. Therefore, it will be reflected in the outturn when we demonstrate how it has been paid. (*Interjection*) Madam Speaker, from a sedentary position I hear the hon. Gentleman saying words which are more acceptable than the reference to the excrement of the male cow, which is what he was saying
1535 when Sir Joe Bossano was speaking, and I will, therefore, remind him that we will see whether we have a surplus next year, or not. We were estimating a surplus of £3.3 million before we knew we had to make the payment of the £10 million, but as he knows, every year it is likely that we will exceed the income, and therefore it is very likely that even despite the £10 million being amortising in respect of the effect of income, we will still end up with a surplus, which is what we
1540 believe.

But let's do the exercise of looking at the things the hon. Gentleman says in reality. One of the things that his test leads to, one of the things that he would do if suddenly he had become Minister for Public Finance ... Obviously they thought they were almost there because that is why they were saying they would not rule out tax increases. That is why it is obvious that they would have come for people's allowances, they would have come for people's overtime; they would have cut overtime and allowances, they would have cut public sector pay – or they would have cut the size of the public sector, because the Hon. the Leader of the Opposition is sitting next to a Shadow Minister for Public Finance who is saying that the Civil Service and the public sector is bloated. It is there in *Hansard* for all to see. If they have said that and they say that there is an
1545 issue with the public finances, what they must be telling us ... Again, let's lift the lid so everyone on the street knows, the people who are outside No. 6 Convent Place and everybody else, that what they stand for is not a greater amount of public sector pay rise; they stand for cutting the cost of the public sector. That is the reality.

Madam Speaker, it is quite remarkable to hear the Hon. Mr Bossino talking about courtesy and etiquette, in particular parliamentary etiquette, when I have already explained that they have more information from us than we ever got from them about timetables, when I explained that the point he was taking was a very bad one because the person sitting next to him had been told within hours of asking when the reply was going to be. But he gets up and says, 'The Hon. the Chief Minister is in the twilight months of this administration. He is a lame duck and this is a
1555 weakened Government. There is no political fire left in their respective bellies.' Well, nobody agrees with him, or at least not enough people agree with him, because it is exactly the same thing that he said in the last Budget and more people decided that we were not lame ducks, that we were not out of energy, that we were not weak and that we were not in our twilight years, and they gave us four more. That is the reality. More people agreed with them this time than last time
1560 but not enough people agreed with them, so he will excuse me for reminding him of the point that we won. We won the General Election; they did not win the General Election.

Frankly, in those circumstances I found it really quite remarkable to hear that the hon. Gentleman felt a point worth making was that I was not here to listen to John Cortes, whom I had told I was not going to be able to be here, and in fact I told the House I would not be here, for the very good reason that I had one of my children's sports days. As a parent, with the same problem, even though I am the Leader of the House and could have said, 'Well, let's sit through it,' instead I spoke to the Minister. Because we share the ideas, I knew what he was going to say: he was going to report to the Cabinet on the work that we do together. That is why I was not here. It is not as if they have been here all the time. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition has not been
1570 here all the time; he does not have to be. The only person who has to be here all of the time is me, at least to listen to all speeches of Opposition Members. As a courtesy, although I may disagree with what they are saying and sometimes may not like what they are saying, I have to reply to them and it would be grossly unfair, lacking in courtesy and lacking in etiquette if I replied to somebody not having heard what they have said – although that is what they do to me. They
1575 answer my Budget address as if they had not heard by Budget address. It is quite remarkable. So we will not take any lessons on etiquette from them, Madam Speaker.
1580

1585 Then the question of Sir Joe Bossano's letter to the newspaper came up. The hon. Gentleman said there is such a difference of position between the Hon. Sir Joe Bossano and the Deputy Chief Minister etc. There is absolutely no difference of position between the Hon. Sir Joe Bossano and the Deputy Chief Minister, or indeed the Leader of the House. We are all of the same mind. We express it in the same way sometimes and in slightly different ways, but we express the same sentiment. What good does it do Gibraltar for the Hon. Mr Bossino to get up and say the Spanish might have in the room somebody slightly softer than Joe Bossano, who is slightly harder? Does that help us in the negotiation? Does he think that is helpful? Of course it is not helpful, but he does not care. But it is also not true, Madam Speaker. That the Father of the House wrote a letter in his personal terms replying to something that had mentioned him and setting out his view about his eyelids does not mean that all our eyelids have not also been surgically removed, because we do not blink on this side of the table. We do not blink at all, okay? So, there is absolutely no difference between us.

1595 A theme that both of them have developed is that the GSLP is deeply unpopular. Seriously? We had a general election nine months ago, and it was not the GSLP that lost it.

1600 A web of companies that is dangerous? They have been going on about the web of companies since 1995. When they get the chance to come into government, they add companies to the web, although when they are in government it becomes the corporate structure of His Majesty's Government of Gibraltar and when we are in government it is a jungle of companies. You could not get a more 'do as I say and not as I do' opposition than this.

1605 'Why did the Government not hold the McGrail Inquiry before the election? Because then we would have won,' they said. 'Why did you not publish the Principal Auditor's report before the election? Because then we would have won,' they said. I am not able to tell the Chairman of the Inquiry when to sit, and there are so many lawyers that getting their diaries together was a difficult thing, so they set a particular timetable and a particular date. I did not set it, and I did not set the date of the election to be before or after the McGrail Inquiry, because the McGrail Inquiry was beyond the end of the lifetime of the last Parliament. I got the Principal Auditor's report 24 hours before I sent it to the Parliament to be laid, so I did not sit on the Principal Auditor's report for one minute. If it is true that they would have won a general election against the GSLP led by me in coalition with our Liberal partners led by the Deputy Chief Minister if it had been held after the McGrail Inquiry, then they were unlucky, and if they would have won it after the Principal Auditor's report they were equally unlucky because they came after. I suppose any opposition in the world could point to things happening after they have lost an election and say, 'If that had happened before, I might have won.' I suppose it is the comfort of fools to do that.

1615 Then they say that I did not have an oven-ready treaty agreement; I did not have it 99% of the way there, as I said. The road to cavalry is easier than the road to this treaty. It sometimes appears that things are agreed and then they are not, and nothing is agreed until everything is agreed, and things are agreed which are agreed and then they are not, but perhaps nobody should be surprised given the negotiating partners that we have here. It is perhaps normal that at five minutes to midnight they try again and they push again. What people have is a Government that sticks to its position whether it is five minutes to midnight or just before the signature, or not, even if we cannot do the agreement, because the pressure is, 'Now you have said you are going to do the agreement, if you do not concede on this then you do not do the agreement ...' well, that is why we do not set a time horizon for the agreement. But we were almost there and then the tide came out a bit, and then the tide is coming in again. The question is can we get it right, not can we just do it for the sake of doing it, because we will not do it just for the sake of doing it. The Hon. Sir Joe Bossano will not blink and neither will the Hon. Nigel Feetham or the Hon. Pat Orfila, or the Hon. Gemma Arias-Vasquez, or the Hon. Christian Santos, or the Hon. John Cortes, or the Hon. Leslie Bruzon, or the Hon. Joseph Garcia, or Fabian Picardo. We do not do blink.

1630 Frankly, I thought that he was less than generous when he said that the Knightsfield contract does nothing which is value for money. He said there is no value. Has he forgotten that the value was fixed, the thing which he says has no value? The value was fixed by Mr Reyes when he was a

1635 Minister. Has he forgotten that? This is a contract, by the way, led by people who have got
 Gibraltar into a Netflix series and on the front page of the *New York Times* and the front page of
National Geographic, and it does nothing for tourism in Gibraltar? This is not an argument worthy
 of a putative leader of our community. He says he wants to be leader of the GSD and he says he
 wants the GSD to be the Government. That means he must want to be the Chief Minister of
 Gibraltar. How can he say that the people who have got us on the front page of the *New York*
 1640 *Times* and the *National Geographic* and have got us a Netflix series which is obviously attracting
 interest in Gibraltar, who enabled us to have a world heritage site, who have discovered the first
 etching by a Neanderthal – probably the first human etching in history, which is probably our most
 priceless asset – bring no value? He has chosen the worst possible example.

1645 His speech yesterday was probably the speech I have heard in the context of this debate which
 was the lightest on policy. It was all about personalities; the personalities here in respect of the
 leadership and the personalities of those running contracts. He just never seems to hit the
 bullseye. Whether it is us that he is shooting at or whether it is the Hon. Mr Azopardi that he is
 shooting at in the context of a leadership campaign, he never seems to be able to shoot his dart
 to hit the bullseye. It is remarkable. But no doubt if there had been an election in 1988 for head
 1650 boy of Bayside Comprehensive, he would have won. I have no doubt of that: he would have bought
 every vote with bubble gum and Chupa Chups.

He uses the Thatcher adage that socialists always run out of other people's money. That is why
 they should call me a socialist, not a pseudo-socialist. If they are going to rely on Thatcher and her
 analogy that socialists always run out of people's money, they should say you are a socialist, not
 1655 you are a pseudo-socialist. Socialists always run out of other people's money: he says that to the
 Government that has delivered the highest revenue in the history of Gibraltar consistently. In
 other words, there are not fewer people paying into government coffers lower amounts; there
 are more people paying more amounts into government coffers and government coffers are filling
 more. Because we are socialists we are spending, but we do not run out of people's money,
 1660 because we follow the golden rule. In that context, how can he say that he looks after the interests
 of the working class? Nobody in the working class would believe that. Look at what we have done
 on the Minimum Wage: up every year. Look under them. He was in the executive; he is responsible
 for it, he is fixed with it. Just like he says Nigel Feetham is fixed with the sins of Daniel Feetham
 for being in the executive in 2011, *he* was in the executive in 2011. They did not put up the
 1665 Minimum Wage in most years. They put up the Minimum Wage only in election year. How is he
 looking after the interests of the working class? How is he saying that the working class should be
 looked after if he says that the Civil Service is bloated? If they are against the pay rise in the public
 sector ... An AA is going to see their salary go up 5.4%, an AO 5.3%, an EO 4.6% and an HEO 3.25%.
 They are against this because they say the cost of the public sector is too high.

1670 Really, when he says that the Hon. Ms Arias-Vasquez is pursuing her leadership ambitions by
 replying to the Leader of the Opposition and to Mr Clinton, you can see that the man will just
 throw mud for the sake of it – mud, as *they* see it. The Hon. Ms Arias-Vasquez did not do what he
 did – in other words, she did not go on a tour of hon. Members opposite and reply to them as if
 she were presenting the Bill, as he did, as if he were the Leader of the Opposition – she replied on
 1675 her portfolios. Mr Azopardi, in his speech replying to me, talked about Health issues and Health
 spending and she replied, and Mr Clinton, in replying to the Hon. Sir Joe Bossano, talked about
 Health spending and she replied on Health spending. That is the reality.

We are very proud of the fact that there is a benefactor who trusts us so much that they want
 to provide for the Community Mental Health Team's new facility. We are not going to say that this
 1680 benefactor is not going to be disclosed, but the benefactor wants to choose the moment when
 they disclose their contribution in the way that they consider appropriate, and we support that.
 No doubt he will be there to have his picture taken when we open it, because he is there to have
 his picture *every* time. The only thing that the hon. Gentleman takes pride in not being seen at is
 Pride. The only Saturday that he cannot make it down to Main Street in time is Pride weekend. I
 1685 am thinking of collecting him in the Porsche and taking him down to Casemates so that we can go

down together, so that I make sure he does not miss it. He is going to run out of excuses sooner or later. He is going to have to stick his colours to the mast again because the GSD is involved in an exercise of saying, through some of the leadership, 'Whilst I am in control of the leadership, the GSD will be progressive,' and then others in the leadership are saying, 'I accept progress

1690 insofar as it has happened already, but you could not pull me to more progress whatever you do; except, of course, there are some things that we might have to undo, like abortion.' That is the reality of what we are dealing with, people who pretend to be progressives, who voted against abortion in this House. That is the reality, Madam Speaker. Anyway, I look forward to him being there to have his picture taken when we open the new CMHT, although I have no doubt that I

1695 would not be able to drag him to Casemates, to Pride, despite the engine capacity of the vehicle we have just discussed.

The fact that the whole of his tourism strategy seems to be to go to FITUR belies where he thinks our centre of gravity perhaps should be. We do not think our centre of tourism strategy should be Spain. Lots of people go to Spain who also come to Gibraltar; that is great, it is part of

1700 what we need to do – we need to get people from the Costa to come here – but we do not think that we need to go to FITUR. He constantly says that we need to go to FITUR every year. Can I just say to him, Madam Speaker, that we will take it as read next year that he wants us to go to FITUR; he does not have to tell us. At least it will save us five seconds of his address and then I will not have to reply, so it will save us three minutes of mine. We have been doing it since he has been

1705 elected to this House, 'y darle con FITUR, y darle con FITUR.' It is as if tourism started and ended at FITUR.

And then, the nonsense that he came up with that we had now had a Damascene conversion in respect of the Air Terminal. The hon. Gentleman had said, 'We have an Air Terminal where passengers come and get on planes and it is really useful because that is how they arrive when

1710 they come on planes.' He said, 'At last, you have noted the value of the Air Terminal, which was a GSD investment.' Madam Speaker, that is not what we said. We said at the time, 'The Air Terminal is a waste of money if you spend it before you are spending money on a new mental health facility, which we sorely need. You should not be doing that to comply with an agreement with Spain to put the Airport on the Frontier line, which Spain may not comply with.' And behold, Spain did not

1715 comply. Then, it was a £20 million airport terminal. The one thing that hon. Members used to accuse me of in the 2011 General Election campaign was of going everywhere with the *Gibraltar Chronicle* that had the headline 'Caruana commits to £20 million Air Terminal' when by then, in 2011, the price was already at £60 million. How dare they talk to us about overspends? This is remarkable. On top of that, then Spain did not comply with the agreement and we get elected to

1720 find KGV in a decrepit state and no work done whatsoever in respect of Ocean Views. That is why we took so long to open the Air Terminal, because we concentrated all resources on what matters for the people of Gibraltar, not on agreements with Spain; on making sure that we had the ability to house those who need a mental health facility, which was what they deserved. We do not resilie

1725 from that, although we do have an airport terminal and people there get off planes and get on planes, and that is all we have said about it. That is the reality.

Why is it that the Hon. Mr Santos did not refer to the Future Job Strategy? Because we have 27 people unemployed and the Future Job Strategy continues with the assistance to employers etc. but the success has been to get it from 490-something to the 27 – the average there. So we do not need to harp on about it unless they want to attack it again, in which case we will once

1730 again remind them that what has seen the dramatic reduction in unemployment in Gibraltar is the Future Job Strategy that they were against. Now it is the thing that delivers. More employment is what they were against. That is the reality. If there is a young person here who does not know these arguments, they should go back and read my Budget speeches from 2011 in this debate. It will take you a while but you will realise we were right about that, too. (*Interjection*) It may be

1735 boring, yes, because you would have to read all of the attacks from Members of the Opposition which are then proved to be wrong, but that is the reality.

1740 I was struck by the fact that he pointed at the Hon. Ms Orfila and said, 'She only had me for one art lesson one day.' Well, she had me for a lot more – Mr Santos, Mr Feetham – so obviously there was some magic in the way that Pat Orfila taught that got us all to this side of the House and did not relegate us just to that side of the House. (*Banging on desks*) Congratulations to the many thousands of Gibraltarian men who were taught by her. He wanted to denigrate her. He said, 'She has no control over the housing projects that are ongoing. This is really quite terrible.' He believes how he sees – in my view, Madam Speaker – the role of a woman Minister when he says that. In fact, every Minister for Housing has not had control of the development of affordable housing because affordable housing is a public finance project run by the Chief Technical Officer and the Financial Secretary under the auspices of the Chief Minister from No. 6 Convent Place – every Chief Minister, starting with the first one to develop affordable housing, which was Sir Joe Bossano – so there is nothing for him to say to Pat Orfila in that respect.

1745 Rent and repair: here is the contract. It is already quite advanced and there are already 13 addresses that are likely to come into the scope of it, and we really look forward to it. There is no question of this not being something that is going to develop. Actually, it is definitely going to develop.

1755 **Hon. D J Bossino:** He has not got it.

Hon. Chief Minister: What do you mean I have not got it? I have just given it back to her. I did not –

1760 **Hon. D J Bossino:** No, she has not got it.

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, the hon. Gentleman says she has not got it. She gave it to me this morning and I said let me have it so that I can make a note to remind the hon. Gentleman of how wrong he was about that too, and now that I have reminded him about how wrong he was about that too – like every material fact that he has sought to rely on – I have given it back to her so that she can remind him of how wrong he has got it in respect of rent and repair in days and months to come.

1770 He obviously did not like that she is such a strong advocate for the issues that she cares about, that she got more than a word in edgeways on television with him. He seems to think that she should have allowed him to have more of a say. Well, Madam Speaker, I do not believe in women who sit meekly and quietly in the corner and I very much welcome that the hon. Lady, on that television programme and in any future one, will put him in his place and make sure that she defends her position as well as she does, (*Banging on desks*) as she would have if he had raised with her the issue of the Development Plan. He complains that we have taken 15 years to commission a new Development Plan when they did not update the Development Plan in 2009 since it had been commissioned in 1991. That is to say 18 years they took to do a new Development Plan – and he was in the executive, so he is stuck with that too, based on the fact that he tried to stick to Nigel the things that Daniel had done. This is why he does not think things through, although I have no doubt he would have won the election to be head boy with Chupa Chups and bubble gum in Bayside in 1988, which I absolutely robbed from him.

1780 Then he talks about the delays of Hassan Centenary Terraces, Bob Peliza and Chatham, how they pointed these things out and they have been pointing them out for years that they were not COVID related. Obviously, enough people did not agree with him, because these were points he was making before the General Election, and we won the General Election, not by a great margin but we won it. There is nothing about margins in the Constitution; it is all about seats in this House.

1785 But what we did not do, and what we have never done, is lend a developer £7 million. For those who are new to this House, the GSD in government, with Mr Bossino in the executive, lent £7 million of taxpayers' money to a developer. The developer lost that money. Barclays Bank also lost an amount of that money because they had lent against it to the developer. Barclays Bank

1790 quotes that issue as one of the reasons why they left Gibraltar. The taxpayer lost £7 million and Gibraltar lost Barclays Bank, and it was not the GSLP Liberals who made that loan. We made a loan to the *Sunborn*, which they described as a rust bucket that would never come to Gibraltar. We lent them £40 million, we got all the money back, we made about £12 million or more of interest. When we lend money we do not lose money. When the GSD lent money they lost the whole of the sum of the taxpayers' money that they had lent: the golden legacy of the GSD. We recently
 1795 had to pay an extra £600,000, only last month – hon. Members must be aware of it because it was their law firm that represented us, Triay Stagnetto Neish in Madrid – £600,000 of a claim by the liquidators of Bruesa against the Government of Gibraltar in respect of their Mid-Harbour estate. Seven million pounds lost on a loan which they did not properly secure – taxpayers' money – and now £600,000 paid in Madrid to finally settle a £60 million claim filed against the Government of
 1800 Gibraltar. They cannot not be aware of it, Madam Speaker. We chose to be represented by Triay Stagnetto Neish, not because we wanted a cloak in any way. That is the reality. That is what the Hon. Mr Bossino described as the golden legacy of the GSD. How true that not all that glitters is gold.

1805 The Hon. Ms Ladislaus is serious and careful, and careful in everything that she does, and in particular in the way that she presents herself in this House. I am very grateful for the way that she conducts herself in the context of her questioning of the Minister for Health and other Members and the way that she presented her address, but of course I have to tell her that she must be careful with whom she chooses as a mentor, because if you choose as a mentor in politics somebody who continually fails in politics, then you need to learn from your mentor's mistakes
 1810 rather than simply be guided by him. I deeply believe that she will be an asset to this House in years to come and that her instincts are better than those who seek to influence her. For that reason, when I see the influence of others in the things that she does I do fear that she is not being true to herself in the way that she is making her presentations, but I believe that she will soon, as she finds her parliamentary feet – and there are many new Members on this side and on the other
 1815 side – be clearer in the way that she sees her portfolios etc. It is normal; this is the beginning, not the end. I think that she will add, to the elegance that she brings to debate and the way that she presents things, her own instinct because I saw that she was the only one of the Opposition MPs to extend congratulations to Ms Arias-Vasquez about her representation of the people of Gibraltar in New York, which I thought was the courteous and proper way to approach it and I think that it
 1820 does her great credit to do so. Her defence of the Hon. the Leader of the Opposition and the fact that he had characterised the hon. Lady's intervention in New York as a photo opportunity, perhaps without realising quite how he was putting his foot in it – (*Interjection by Hon. Dr K Azopardi*) Well, it is how we have read it.

1825 **Hon. Dr K A Azopardi:** You are lying.

Hon. Chief Minister: It is not a lie, it is how we have read it, Madam Speaker.

1830 **Hon. Dr K A Azopardi:** You are lying.

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, the hon. Gentleman needs to calm down. The fact that others might see things in a different way, the fact that we may have interpreted what he has said in a particular way, may or may not be to his liking but it is certainly not to lie. The hon. Lady's defence of him rang hollow and it demonstrated that obviously the hon. Lady had hit home with
 1835 the statement that she had made, because no sooner had the hon. Lady made that statement the Hon. the Leader of the Opposition was deploying both the Hon. Ms Ladislaus and the Hon. Ms Sanchez to say that that is not what he meant. Well, Madam Speaker, I certainly do hope that it is not what he meant.

1840 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** On a point of order –

Hon. Chief Minister: You have to point out which point of order it is.

Hon. D J Bossino: [*inaudible*] yesterday.

1845 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** On a point – (*Interjection*)

Madam Speaker: All right, I am going to hear the Hon. Mr Azopardi. Please – (*Interjection*) Order. I want to hear the Hon. Mr Azopardi. Yes?

1850 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** A point of order. The Hon. the Chief Minister is misleading the House by saying that I made a reference to the hon. Lady's appearance at the United Nations. There is nothing in my speech that refers to the United Nations visit. I would like him to correct the record.

1855 **Madam Speaker:** My understanding is that the Hon. the Chief Minister said that that is how he interpreted – (*Interjection*) Can I just finish my sentence and then – hands can come down – I will allow comment. The Hon. the Chief Minister, to my understanding, said this is how he interpreted what the Hon. the Leader of the Opposition had said. I will allow the Hon. the Chief Minister to answer that, and then, if necessary, I will rule.

1860 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, that is not what I have said; I have said it is our view of what the hon. Gentleman has said. We will interpret the views of the hon. Gentleman in the way that we think is appropriate because, whether hon. Members like it or not, they are not the guardians of our interpretation of the things that they say. We have our own minds and we can interpret and read between the lines, but that is the reality of what they said. The Hon. Ms Arias-Vasquez is not known for having a particularly thin skin – she has been working with me for long enough to have developed a fairly hard crust – and all of us read it in that way. You know what I am prepared to accept, Madam Speaker? That the hon. Gentleman would be cackhanded enough to not even have meant it. But that is how we interpreted it and that means that the interpretation was certainly one of which it was capable, and then he deployed his assets to try to have the whole thing undone. Well, I think the damage is done.

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Madam Speaker: My view on this exchange is that the Hon. Ms Ladislaus read out what the Hon. the Leader of the Opposition had said in relation to the comment on the United Nations, so it is in the public ... They have a record of what the Hon. the Leader of the Opposition has said. The public can interpret it as they wish and this side of the House can interpret it as they wish. So, we will move on.

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Hon. Chief Minister: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

1880 Yes I agree, as I said before, that there are issues about parenting and being in Parliament and timetables that we need to try to fix, but it is not exclusively in the Government's domain because the Government can lose control of its agenda if we simply look at timings being unaffected by questions etc.

1885 The hon. Lady said money makes the world go round but it does not buy good government. I could not agree with the hon. Lady more. That is the reality. Good government is brought by conscience and by hard work. That is what we have delivered, and the public has agreed because they have once again chosen us to become the Government of Gibraltar, less than nine months ago. I remind the hon. Lady that in the run up to that general election, during the period of the two years before, there were a number of demonstrations outside No. 6 Convent Place, sometimes with more people than there were on Monday, and yet we still won the election because people trusted us more than they trusted them. We can go through a post-mortem of the general election if they like, but it would be a post-mortem because the general election

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happened already, and unless they are going to start challenging it in Trumpian style, the reality is that we won and they did not. That is why we are here and they are not; they are there.

1895 Poverty does not mean that some people cannot access healthcare in Gibraltar, however, because we are not in the United States and our system of healthcare means that all those with or without means can access universal healthcare. There may be some things that people want that are only available in the private sector but that does not mean that they cannot access healthcare. They have better access in Gibraltar to a universal system of healthcare free at the point of delivery than people do in the United Kingdom, which is where the model was
1900 established. Indeed, the problem that hon. Members have is that the proposition that she presents clashes directly with the proposition that her mentor and the Shadow Minister for Public Finance to her right present, which is that we are spending too much on health, that it is out of control and it is the Minister's responsibility. It is really absolutely wrong for them to say that.

1905 Then the issue of COVID and the COVID debt is not what gives rise to the problem, she said, it is the mismanagement by Government. Well, I commend the hon. Lady to read – *(Interjection by Hon. Dr K Azopardi)* Madam Speaker, I think the Hon. the Leader of the Opposition is getting so upset that he is finding it difficult to control himself, even from a sedentary position. He should not worry. I will be able to continue – *(Interjection)*

1910 **Madam Speaker:** I did not hear what the Hon. the Leader of the Opposition was saying, so carry on, please.

Hon. Chief Minister: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I will continue despite it. Even if there is to be an element of background music from the Leader of the Opposition, I will continue through it
1915 until he calms down.

The £500 million COVID debt was actually acquired together. The last time that we voted together for a Budget was the Emergency Budget of March 2020, which is the Budget where we took the £500 million of debt. They said, 'The fact that we are voting for this Budget should not be taken as a blank cheque; we still hold the views that we hold in relation to debt,' and we said,
1920 'Of course you do, that is no problem,' but the £500 million came from that Budget. That is the reality. So, the hon. Lady I think would benefit from going back to read some of those seminal debates in this House and understand how the £500 million was used for the benefit of all in our community, in particular in relation to health.

1925 For many people the lack of financial resources means that they will not have access to healthcare: that is not true in our community, Madam Speaker. Everybody has access to healthcare. If you are of means you might also be able to have private healthcare, but our public healthcare here is probably amongst the best in the world. We are not seeing an inefficient use of resources, although there is always space for more efficient use of resources, which is what the Minister was saying. I commend the Minister for inviting the hon. Member opposite, her shadow,
1930 to go and visit the Omnicrom system – **(Hon. Ms Arias-Vasquez:** Omnicell.) Omnicell system – because I think that will help everybody's understanding of how it works, it will help the hon. Lady to ask more relevant questions and I think it is an excellent way of proceeding.

1935 We have not changed ambulances since 2011, the hon. Lady said, 'You have just invested lots of money in maintenance'. It is not true. I do not know where she got that from. First of all, ambulances were a *big* issue in the 2011 General Election campaign. One of my former Ministers got stuck on the road in an ambulance and will forever remember that, and the minute he was elected he made it an issue. One of my current Ministers has also been in an ambulance being conveyed from Gibraltar and has told the whole House how she carries that with her. Emergency ambulances were purchased in 2012. Two transport ambulances were purchased new in 2013 as
1940 well. An emergency ambulance was purchased in 2013, which has since been decommissioned. Two HDU ambulances were purchased in 2013. Those have since been decommissioned. We replaced them in 2017 and in 2018. A rapid response ambulance was purchased in 2019, another rapid response ambulance was purchased in 2023; another emergency ambulance in 2023; a

1945 transport ambulance in 2023. A further HDU ambulance was ordered in October 2023 and two
emergency vehicles were purchased in March 2024. That is 12 ambulances purchased and
delivered in the period that she says we have not purchased new ambulances. I tell the hon. Lady
these are her first faltering steps as a Member of this House. I believe she will take many more
less faltering steps. She will take them better when she checks the work to make sure that nobody
is leading her up the garden path. She cannot have believed, of a Government led by me, that we
1950 would not have bought any ambulances since 2012, especially if she buys into the fact that I am
the Chief Minister that spends most money. She cannot have believed that I spent the most money
on everything and not on ambulances, and that we still have the ambulances from 2011, although
I must say the fact that she identified that we spent money on maintaining ambulances does not
prove the point that she was going to make, because if she says, 'You spent £400,000 on tyres on
1955 ambulances in this period and you could have changed the ambulances' When an ambulance
gets a punctured tyre you do not change the ambulance, you change the tyre, of course.

So, I say to the hon. Lady these issues are not credible and she needs to be on top of the things
that she has been told. She needs, of course, to have an ear to the ground on the things that she
has been told, but the lesson I learnt – and I learnt it much as she is learning this one when I made
1960 the mistake, with the Hon. the Father of the House as my leader – was that when you are told
something, you ask a question which does not put that as a premise. You ask a question about
how many new ambulances have been bought since 2011, you then get the answer and you do
not come to the Budget and assert the contrary, because otherwise you get the response that I
am giving her now. I hope that she will accept that I am doing it in good faith to demonstrate to
1965 her that it is factually incorrect and actually the reality is a different one and the debate should be
about the different. Maybe she wanted to say that we should have bought 24 new ambulances
rather than 12, maybe that is the argument, but it is certainly not that we bought no ambulances
because that is not true, and because it is not true it is not fair. Yes, we rented ambulances for
four weeks because there was an issue with ambulances being able to go to Spain, so we wanted
1970 to make sure that there was no issue and that is why we rented ambulances in this key area.

On the mental health budget, Madam Speaker, frankly the hon. Lady needs to remember
where we were. As I was saying before, hon. Members spent on the Air Terminal instead of on the
new mental health facility. We inherited the old KGV almost as it is now, probably derelict. It was
the most decrepit facility that you can imagine. We have invested *a lot* in that.

1975 The hon. Lady questions who is advising the Government on the complement of mental health
services. Well, the divisional lead for mental health services, who is advising the Minister because
the Minister is not competent to make decisions in relation to matters of mental health, and there
is also a divisional lead who advises on complement. We currently have five psychiatrists, five
psychologists, one counsellor and eight further counsellors in the Care Agency, so how can the
1980 hon. Lady say that we are being forced to cut resources? I do not know whether the hon. Lady is
listening but this is important because it is about the point she made. In fact, with five
psychiatrists, five psychologists, one counsellor in the GHA and eight counsellors in the Care
Agency we are not cutting resources, we are improving resources, because if she cares to look at
the Estimates Book for 2011-12 there was then one consultant clinical psychiatrist, one
1985 psychologist – that is four less – and 0.5 counsellors, that is 8.5 less. So, we are not cutting
resources; we have hugely increased resources in matters related to mental health. Again, on
issues of counsellors, the Minister is being advised by the clinical lead, the departmental lead, so
we are not cutting resources and it does not help the debate to say that we are doing the opposite
of what in fact has happened. In fact, the argument is we are spending too much, which is not
1990 cutting resources, it is adding too many resources, and it would be consistent for them to say, 'Do
you really need five psychiatrists and five psychologists? We think that you can be more efficient
and make those work more,' which would be in keeping with what they are saying about spending
less in Health, which is the opposite of what they now say.

On specialisations, of course we agree there are some things that could never come to
1995 Gibraltar, but there are some things that can and the things that can are the ones that we are

bringing – the Hon. Minister I think explained that very clearly to the Hon. Mr Clinton in her responses – and that is why relief cover is going down.

2000 The hon. Lady then accused the Hon. Minister of ... because she was going to review something, she said 'Waiting for that review may cause a problem.' Has she forgotten that she was standing with the party that was promising to do more reviews as part of their manifesto than any of the others in the election campaign? When she said the review is going to be a problem because it is going to delay things, she then went on, a few sentences later, to call for a review of remuneration. So, reviews are bad and then reviews are good and will help morale.

2005 In relation to Justice, Madam Speaker, there are no less officers on the beat; far from it, there are more police resources than ever before. The Commissioner of Police has been very clear in his exchanges with the Government about the need for high-profile police officers. A further 12 police officers started in January 2024. The RGP continues to fulfil its obligations to recruit 10 command and dispatch officers. There are I do not know how many more police officers now than in 2011. The hon. Lady might want to look at the complement of police in 2011 and now. If I allow myself one comment about the McGrail Inquiry, it is that I could not resist saying to my own lawyer when he was examining me, in chief or in re-examination, that yes, we were all committed to the Police but I had invested approximately £10 million more in the Police. So, I think that is clear.

2015 On notes of operational independence for the RGP, the Minister for Justice gave an answer to Question 65/2024 and demonstrated that the question of outstanding warrants has nothing to do with a lack of police resources, far from it.

He dealt also with the issue of counselling at the Prison, because this used to be done independently. The Prison have not been able to replace that.

2020 On juvenile offenders, I think that there can be wide agreement across the floor of the House. The Hon. Minister for Justice is purporting to work across the ministerial divide to ensure that we all work together to do the best for our juvenile offenders. There should be no reason why we do not work across the divide in this House as well, because on this I am sure that we can all be united.

2025 I do not accept from her or from anyone else that Government has no conscience. Of course Government has a conscience, even if as a construct, because it is not an individual, it does not have a mind and therefore it does not have a conscience, but the individuals who make up the Government have a conscience. When she says to us, 'Check your consciences,' she does not need to tell us. We check our consciences every single day to make sure that what we are doing is right in every material respect. This is not a question of red sky at night, shepherd's delight and a false dawn, far from it, because you see, Madam Speaker, every day has better times and worse times, every day has a cloud, but when we talked about a new dawn in 2011 we talked about specific things that we were going to do. Maybe the hon. Lady has not been in this House to hear me before, so perhaps I have to repeat it. One of the things we were going to do, in Health in particular, was IVF. IVF was not permitted under the GSD. Perhaps it might not be in the future under a GSD Government if it is led by those who are less progressive. No IVF. Couples who could have had children were not having children. We ensured not just that we invested in KGV, created the Children's Primary Care Centre and a new Primary Care Centre; we ensured that one of the things that we did after 11th December 2011 which we had committed ourselves to do, and now we do also in relation to same-sex couples etc, was that we permitted and funded IVF. The new dawn gave rise to the fertilisation that might not have happened in some instances. There are people walking around Main Street who are the product of the new dawn. The new dawn has a name and a surname. The new dawn is no longer even in upper primary school. The new dawn is in upper primary school about to go to comprehensive. Many of those people are the reality of the new dawn of what we ushered in – of the bright sunlight that Sir Keir refers to today – that we brought to this economy in 2011 with the changes that we brought. So, I say to hon. Members opposite by all means hold us to account, by all means, if you like, take the attitude that you attack, but check your conscience when you do because it is a two-way road.

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2050 Madam Speaker, the Hon. Ms Sanchez then started to give an address which I think helped to demonstrate that the best way to ensure that the public see how right they were to return us as Government and her to Opposition and not to ministerial office is to see more of her, and the more she speaks the more they will see that her attributes are not, in my view, suited to ministerial office. She certainly did not agree with the presentation that the Hon. Mrs Ladislaus has made of the new dawn. That was not her view. I am very clear: whenever I replace my phone, as the hon. Gentleman said, my emails do not change. I have an email from the first working day after the new dawn, which says:

From: Atrish Norton

2055 – that is why I put Norton; she will excuse me –

To: Fabian.Picardo@gmail.com

– it is not just the Hon. the Minister for the Environment’s email that I happily give out –

Subject: Re. Congratulations

Hon. D J Bossino: What are you hoping to get from Nigel Feetham?

2060 **Hon. Chief Minister:** A hug, Madam Speaker, which is what I always get from Nigel Feetham, whichever side we are on. Whatever side. (*Interjection*) Picardo.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: I hope you watched the video this morning. There will be more of that.

2065 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, politics does not have to get in the way of friendship, like they want it to.

It said this, from Atrish Norton to Fabian Picardo on the morning of Monday, 12th December:

Good morning. I know you asked me to email you a week after the elections but I wanted to congratulate you on your well-deserved victory. It is amazing to see how excited and happy most people are. You have brought a breath of fresh air and sense of hope that was much needed in Gibraltar. I am certain, for one, that you will keep your promises and be a man for the people, Mr Picardo. Congratulations. When you have some time after everything has settled, please let me know when we can discuss what we spoke about before the elections. Well done and congratulations again, Atrish Norton.

2070 Well, we spoke about that, and that is how Atrish Norton became a part of the Future Job Strategy and worked in the Government. So, not everybody thought it was a false dawn, but people change their minds; things happen in life and they change your perspective, of course. There is not just one election in history and after that everything stays the same – of course, but if then Nigel Feetham was there, then she was here.

2075 Madam Speaker, it might be helpful for the Hon. Mr Bossino to understand that that was not the only email I had from Ms Norton because, as I have said, there were things happening in No. 6 Convent Place between June and December 2011 which we think were really quite unfair and much worse than anything that they have even alleged against us. I got this from Atrish, then Norton, on Thursday, 10th November 2011:

Dear Fabian, as I mentioned when we spoke, I had requested to see the Chief Minister back in February.

– then Sir Peter Caruana –

Coincidentally, a few weeks before election time, I was called to his office to inform me that I could have a meeting at 12 today.

– 10th November; the election had already been called, the campaign was on foot –

However, the CM did not take the time to see me. Instead, Minister Feetham did,

– *no tu, el otro* –

for what was more of a party political broadcast than anything else.

2080 – it is 10th November at 19:46. It is atrish.norton@Ladbrokes.co.uk, if it is any help –

Despite their attempts, they have been unable to sway my own or my family's vote. His best advice was that I should return to the United Kingdom to do a PhD in forensics, something which is not exactly related to my studies as it is more of a science-based discipline. Moreover, I could not really put my ideas, views, or opinions across. I thought I would take the time to go as I had been contacted back then, but it seems that they do not have any real interest in helping qualified graduates. Nepotism seems the only way to advance under this Government.

– the GSD –

I thought I would keep you updated. Hope everything is going well and I will hopefully be able to carry on discussing any job prospects when you soon become our new Chief Minister. Kind regards, Atrish Norton.

I try to be courteous and have etiquette, and I try to reply to everything, Madam Speaker. I replied that same day at 23.32:

Dear Atrish, thank you for your email updating me on progress. I guess that the GSD are now trying harder than ever to pretend that they care about people.

– and this is the point, Madam Speaker; I was pointing it out even then –

It is the oldest trick of the GSD book: ignore people for four years and then pretend to care for a month. I am convinced that most people now, like you, will see through this. As long as they do, I will very much look forward to working with you shortly after the election. All the very best, Fabian.

2085 So, I am pretty clear that not everybody saw us as a false dawn. People may change their minds but four successive new dawns suggests that we have done something in that time, at least bought the odd ambulance or two.

2090 The hon. Lady talks about matters relating to disability. Of course, I understand that these are hugely important issues, so let's look at the record of the party that she decided to stand with on disability: no increase in disability benefits by the GSD between 1996 and 2003. That is to say she has stood for election led by a man who was Deputy Chief Minister and Minister in the Governments in our history that least put up disability. For eight years they did not put it up. They put it up in 2003, the year before the election. No increase in 2005, 2008, 2009, 2010, but obviously an increase in 2007 and in 2011 because of the election. That is to play cynically, in our view, with those who rely on any benefit when you put that benefit up early at election time; cynical manipulation.

2095 We have put up the disability benefit every single year since we were elected. It was £304, it is now £485: 60%, or an average of 5% a year. And we have not just increased it; 162 people used to claim it. The hon. Lady will know why, because when we were elected and under the Governments which involved the Hon. the Leader of the GSD, the Leader of the Opposition, when he was Deputy Chief Minister and when he was a Minister, and which involved Mr Bossino and Mr Clinton in the executive at different times, 162 people claimed because you had to be born with a disability at birth to be able to claim. That was creating huge injustice. Now, 539 people claim Disability Benefit because we changed the rule so you could qualify for it. I get that we have some people who are waiting for the assessment to be made, but at least the assessment can be

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made. In their time, the party that she represents with the leader who was a Minister in those Governments, you were either were born with it and assessed with it when you were born or you never qualified for it. I would not have thought that that is a record for her to be proud of in the party that she represents. By the way, the same is true of pensions. The pensions have gone up under us from £398 to £571: 44%. That is how we defend people who need our help, Madam Speaker. We change the rules so that people who are not born with a disability can qualify for disability benefit. That is how we help people. Yes, I get it, there is a backlog, more people who want to qualify, but *they* limited it to 162. If we had not changed the rules, it might be 200 now, but not 539. We change the rules.

2115 Then the hon. Lady says the majority of people accept that the Government's handling of the public finances has been a total car crash. Well, I do not know whether the car crash is an allusion to the thing that we are constantly talking about – the car – in this debate. No problem. *Me lo gané* The car crash bit is funny. I get it, right? But let's be clear, the majority do not think that. The majority think we should stay in charge of the public finances, because that is what they decided in October – slimmer majority, bigger majority but a majority nonetheless.

2120 The Minister for Health is not ignoring the Mental Health Board's report. She is the one who brought it to this House so that it could be debated. She did not just lay it in this House, she actually debated it. She put a motion. She specifically said that training of registered mental health nurses will commence in September 2024. I do not know whether I have demonstrated that she has got so many things wrong already in the first part of my address to her that she might be whispering to the person standing next to me '*Sálvame*', but she needs to get her facts right. She is not an ineffective speaker. She presents things in a way that might be attractive to people watching, but she needs to get the facts right. She needs to make sure that she is basing herself on facts so that then I cannot come back and say, 'You have got it wrong.' We do not need to get it wrong. We can have a disagreement about whether we do more or we do less, but we cannot be having to point out how you have got it wrong, because that is just not a good use of her resources or the public's resources in funding her, Madam Speaker. If they agree that more needs to be done in this area, they will be supporting what the Hon. Ms Arias-Vasquez is doing, in particular in moving the Community Mental Health facility and in the work that she is doing to make sure that all of the contracts which are in place are contracts that can be looked at, because there already are contracts in Hillside and Bella Vista and the John Mackintosh Wing. There were no contracts for respite services but the tenders issued have been for that and have now been granted, as she will have seen in the press – or she has not read that in the press or she has not understood what the hon. Lady has told her. The GMRB is not ever going to be responsible for care in Gibraltar. That has to be done in a different way, but she will have supported, I assume, and will want to support the fact that the Hon. Minister for Health is now the first ever Minister with responsibility for the quality of care. In the same way as if you care about equality you say, 'My goodness, well done GSLP Liberals for having the first ever Minister for Equality' – Samantha Sacramento, who is no longer here – because you make equality matter,' if you care about the quality of care you will say, 'Well done in appointing a Minister for Quality of Care. I might disagree with things, but at least well done for that.' What the Hon. Mr Origo did, which was to balance his speech by saying some things that we had done right and then saying we could do better, is actually very difficult to answer and I will try to deal with it, but if all you say is that we have done everything wrong it does not quite hit the mark, because we do not do everything wrong. Neither do we do everything right.

2150 Madam Speaker, there is no privatisation going on of the Health Services. They have been saying that for 13 years now. They have been trying to get the unions on side with them on privatisation of the Health Service. Nobody in the Health Service believes it, because it has not happened. I would gently counsel that they need to find other spectres to fly.

2155 The hon. Lady said that meetings with the heads of service in the Care Agency have not occurred. She accused the Minister of not having those meetings. Well, the Hon. Minister for Health has held meetings with the heads of service on the following dates: 12th April 2024, where

2160 they raised concerns just before the board meeting of the Care Agency; 6th May, which was a two-hour meeting requested on 12th April; and 19th June, a consultation meeting with the heads of service and the union. So, wrong again, Madam Speaker. Again, my advice is to ask a question – ‘On what dates has the Minister met ...?’ – and then you will have the answer. Then you might want to come here and say, ‘Have you only met three times with the people in the Care Agency?’ but do not come here to say that meetings have not happened, when they have. A bit more egg on her face with the facts not being right, another objective fact that the hon. Lady is wrong about; 2165 she does not want to do that again. I think the better thing is to be able to come here and tell us what she thinks ideologically we are doing wrong, what we can do better, but not to say things have not happened when they have happened.

On ‘Hampergate’, far from brushing this issue aside – the hon. Lady says the Hon. Minister for Health has brushed this issue aside – the Hon. Ms Arias-Vasquez actually is the person who 2170 brought this to the attention of the Chief Secretary, so instead of brushing it under the carpet she brushed it right up to the Chief Secretary. The hampers were returned on the next working day. She raised the matter at the fortnightly with the Director General, a 197-page report on Hampergate was produced on 21st March 2024 and all recommendations contained in the report were implemented; so, far from covering it up, she has dealt with it and dealt with it properly. The 2175 hon. Lady has not uncovered anything because, as she can see, it was well on the road to being dealt with.

Finally, Madam Speaker, in relation to ASD and ADHD, she will be aware that we are about to publish the neurodevelopment pathway because the Hon. the Minister for Health has shared that with her. She will be aware that we have employed five senior paediatric support workers 2180 specifically to carry out what she is calling out for us to do, which we agree should be done. That is why we are doing it, which is a proactive strategy to address the challenges faced by families with children with ASD and ADHD.

The hon. Lady accused the Hon. Minister for Equality of responding with amusement and trivialising issues. Nothing could be further from the truth. The only amusement stemmed from 2185 the Hon. Minister’s bewilderment that the hon. Member opposite did not grasp the intent of his message and that misunderstanding.

Let’s be very clear, we are doing a huge amount of work in rehabilitation. A lot has changed up there. But I do want to say something, Madam Speaker. I want to mention favourably the work of 2190 a GSD Minister, Hubert Corby, who dedicated a great part of his life to the work of rehabilitation and did a lot in that space; and, before Hubert Corby, Mr Joe Caruana, who, in respect of Camp Emmanuel, also did a lot in that space. We must all continue doing a lot in that space. (*Banging on desks*) There is a new strategy. There is a lot of detail of what is being done in a consultation group, not a working group, which I could give the House but I would invite the hon. Lady to speak to the Minister because she will be disabused of the errors that she made in respect of that area. 2195 Then, next year, perhaps she can come and check what progress there is in the work that is actually being done, rather than suggest that work is not being done.

Madam Speaker, of course we are committed to the issue of the extension of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, but this is not easy and it is not easy for one reason in particular. In autumn 2023 we sent a document to the UK for our inclusion and extension 2200 to us, but the UK has been, in effect, what we might call, in European lexicon, infracted – although this is UN – since 2017 because the UK government have been found guilty of systematic violations of the Convention, so it appears that they cannot get us to join the Convention now because they are under the microscope of the UN. They had a hearing on 18th March 2024, by the UN of the United Kingdom. We are, of course, in through the United Kingdom and so the UK cannot extend 2205 the Convention to us at this time, but we fully agree that we have to proceed down that road. The question is when we can proceed down that road because of the UK’s own difficulties. We would certainly agree with Mr Origo that it is paramount that we are proactive and not reactive in this area, as has been the practice in the past. We started being proactive the minute we were elected – and not proactive, as they had been when they were in government – but we hit the

2210 problem that we have hit with the United Kingdom. Despite that, we have already created our one-stop shop for disability-related issues, which I think is working very well, and Jenny Victory is now under the auspices of the Ministry of the hon. Gentleman.

Madam Speaker, I have said a lot about the contribution of Mr Origo, the youngest contributor. He said we do not do enough for our young people – oh, we should do more, right. My advice, if he is interested in taking it, is that if you are serious about doing this gig you have to read the *Times* every morning and the *Financial Times* and the *Gibraltar Chronicle*, of course, and *El Pais* before you come out of your house. If he had read the *Times* on the day that he gave his address – not just watched it on television; you have to actually read this stuff, yes? – on the front page was this, one of the lead articles: ‘How does it feel to owe £50,000?’ It recounts the life of every UK student, the average UK student. The average UK student now leaves university – a graduate, three years – owing £50,000: £9,000 times three in tuition fees and what it costs to maintain themselves in that period. That is what we do for every young person who goes away to university. We take away the burden of coming back – or staying away – from university with a degree, with £50,000. When you look at the cost of the scholarships, that is obviously the type of amount that we are talking about. We are now talking about also doing something for those who are involved in the Regiment etc. I invite him to speak to the Hon. Mr Santos about just how much we are doing in respect of the Careers Fair. A lot was said already in his speech, so I do not pretend to present it again, but we are doing a lot. We are actually in the presence of – ‘the presence’, as they sometimes talk about the Monarch – the teacher at Bayside who started the Careers Fair, Pat Orfila. She chose to stand with us on this side of the House for a reason, because she understands the commitment that we have to that, which I hope will give the hon. Gentleman an element of comfort. No doubt she is one of the dastardly people who appointed me as head boy in 1988 rather than permit the man who should have been the incumbent sitting opposite.

Madam Speaker, the hon. Gentleman dealt with a lot where ... Look, I have a lot of detail to reply to him and I will happily give him a handout which contains the responses to the things that he said. None of it is combative, it is just showing some areas where we think he may not have seen some of the issues that were being raised. I am happy to share that with him so that he can factor that into his equation and he can still, nonetheless, hold us to account and tell us that we should do better, because we all want to do better and that is part of the job. But he should not for one moment think that we are not alive to depression in the LGBTQ+ community, in particular if they have to read or hear one of the Hon. Mr Bossino’s speeches and what he thinks about that community. Indeed, Madam Speaker, given that both the Minister for Equality and the Shadow Minister for Equality talked about how important the mentorship programme is, I very much look forward to seeing your contribution to the mentorship programme, given the invitation was flung across the floor of the House by Rock Masters himself.

We would not, however, subscribe to the hon. Gentleman’s suggestion that our tourism figures look bleak in any particular respect. Air departure tax is up from 2022-23 to 2023-24 by 35%; Upper Rock tourist sites in the same period by 40%, forecast to increase further in the next year by 21%. Comparing to pre-COVID levels, we are up in revenue terms by 73% from pre-COVID levels – not COVID levels, pre-COVID levels. Cruise numbers are forecast to be up from 2023 by 12% and in 2025 they are forecast to be up by a further 24%, which will be 18% above 2019 – that is to say 18% above pre-COVID levels; the work of Vijay Daryanani and now Christian Santos. The number of coaches increased from 2023 by 26% and a further 19% next year. These are not bleak numbers.

By the way, in case they are not aware, Madam Speaker, I know that they tell us that we need to do more in terms of tourist sites etc., but I do not know whether he is aware that when they were in government not one penny – and I say this hesitantly because when you say not one penny it has to mean not one penny – was invested in the Upper Rock. The taxi drivers and tour operators used to tell us, ‘*No meten un penique.*’ Not one penny was invested in the Upper Rock. We do not just invest, we invest a lot of money in the maintenance of the Upper Rock and you can see it is in a better state. The new Skywalk was a new facility. We brought Mark Hamill over to open it. We

2265 were greatly criticised. It is one of the most watched videos ever in relation to Gibraltar, and *Star Wars* nerds like me kill themselves to get up there. The Windsor Suspension Bridge is a second new facility, and now a new facility is coming with the World War II Tunnels that the Hon. Minister has announced. I know that he needs my attention to be able to agree something which has a public finance consequence that is another new reopening of a site. We have invested more there than they ever did – I say ‘they’ meaning the party that he has chosen to sit with in this House, and so he will forgive me for saying thank you for the advice but we are not going to take it from them, because we think we are doing the job. But he is absolutely right to push us to do more.

2270 Madam Speaker, the Hon. Mr Sacarello just does not seem, to me, to get anything right in terms of numbers, and this is a debate about numbers. He is a lovely chap – I do not think anyone has met Mr Sacarello and thought he is anything other than a lovely chap – but we are not here based on whether we are lovely chaps or not; we are here on the basis of whether we will be more, or less, efficient in the management of the resources of this community chaps. It is wrong
2275 to say that tax has not increased year on year. It may not have increased, he says, in real terms or inflationary terms, but when you look at the tax take you have the COVID issue to deal with but it is very clear that we are going in the right direction. The number of companies incorporated in Gibraltar is not the measure of activity in Gibraltar, because most of the companies that might come to get incorporated in Gibraltar actually are just holding companies. What matters is OFT
2280 activity, the value-added companies that come to the insurance sector, the gaming sector, the B2B sector. It might be one company, Entain or Ladbrokes – which is where I got the emails from just after the general election in 2011, from Ms Atrish Norton – but imagine the economic activity that it creates. So, you have to be a little bit more discerning than that. In particular, Members opposite need to realise ... because I think it was the Leader of the Opposition who was talking
2285 about 60,000 companies, the only person who has referred – (*Interjections*) I know that I create much mirth on the benches opposite but this is an important point, in particular for the Hon. Mr Sacarello, so if they would do me the courtesy, if only momentarily, of listening to me, they will be impressed by the mistake that they have made, Madam Speaker. The only person who has referred to 60,000 companies on the Gibraltar Register before was Mr Margallo, and then the
2290 Leader of the Opposition or he referred to them. There are actually 14,000 companies. I think he will find when he looks at *Hansard* – it may have been a slip of the tongue – that he said that: 60,000 companies. That is the Spanish number. It is actually closer to 14,000 companies.

We do not recognise a stalling Brexit negotiation, Madam Speaker. We really do not recognise that. We think there is a Brexit negotiation where we will not blink, and therefore, if they want us
2295 to sign a deal that requires blinking, we do not blink. If they call that stalling, we call that standing our ground. We will not call it stalling. We will take as long as we have to take to do a deal that is a deal that does not cross red lines, or we will not do a deal, but it is not stalling. There is no stalling Brexit negotiation. Delayed because there was an election in Spain, an election in Gibraltar, an election in Europe, an election here? Okay, maybe. We have to go into technical talks, but what
2300 can you do? Are you going to blame me for the calling of the UK general election or for the calling, by effluxion of time, of the European election? How else can you blame us for this stalling Brexit negotiation? And do you really think that it is appropriate to come here and talk to us about things being clouded in a cloak of secrecy? No. It is a negotiation, and therefore the things that are being discussed in the negotiation are inside the negotiation, because if we take them outside we will
2305 put more pressure on ourselves and that will be worse for the negotiation and therefore worse for Gibraltar. That is the point. But if the Hon. Member wants to make those points, that is fine because I can see that they are the tenor of the seriousness of the point he made next, which is that this heightened uncertainty has led to a paralysis of the economy. (*Interjection*) Did he say that he said ‘partial’? Oh, partial, a partial paralysis of the economy. Well, Madam Speaker, with
2310 paralysed limbs, this economy has got bigger than most economies in the world. It has grown, I have told them, by over 6%, it has got to almost £3 billion and has produced the highest revenue in the history of this place even when the economy was going like the clappers, as it would have been, in their interpretation, when they were in government. So, give me partially paralysed under

2315 the GSLP and not going like the clappers under the GSD, because that is the highest revenue in our history.

2320 Where do they get this from? He came here just to tell us, in effect, what he heard at the Federation of Small Businesses, but if that is his position – and look, he comes from an entrepreneurial background – I accept it. He is not coming here pretending to be a socialist. He is coming here saying, ‘I am an entrepreneur.’ Get up and say, ‘The Minimum Wage should not go up; that is what I believe. The Minimum Wage should go up by less and the public sector pay should go up by less.’ That is what he believes. That is what he should tell us and he would be respected for it. He may or may not garner more or fewer votes but this is not just the politics of trying to get votes; this should be the politics of what you stand for, not pseudo-Christian democracy. At least we are not pseudo-socialists. If he is agreeing with the Chamber, or rather, 2325 Madam Speaker, hang on a minute, a partially paralysed economy where nothing gets done, no inward investment, and yet we managed to get a premium for the Eastside ... We got the premium for the Eastside, and Eastside work has now started. They have not just finished the revetment; they have started doing all of the other work. So, in a partially paralysed economy we have actually got the thing that they never managed to get going, going.

2330 Do you want to go faster on the deal? I can tell him something for nothing, because it has been implicit in everything we have said: there was clearly an opportunity to continue and do a deal, of course there was, crossing all of our historic red lines, all of the reasons that his parents and my parents lived in a Gibraltar with a closed Frontier, but we could have done the deal. Would he have done the deal just so that we were not delayed, stalled or partially paralysed? I hope the answer is no, Madam Speaker, because we would not have done the deal. We will not do the deal 2335 until it is the right deal.

2340 When he says that he agrees with the Chamber’s strategy, and they agree with the Chamber and the Federation, what he is saying is that they will get rid of the taxi drivers. We will not get rid of the taxi drivers. The taxi drivers have done a magnificent job. They were our only ambassadors. They are some of the most premium tours offered for Gibraltar. But the Chamber does not like that, and the Chamber, who represent the transporters and the cable car, want the opposite. I will do the opposite, but let’s be clear who he stands with and who he does not stand with. In adopting, as he did, the Chamber’s criticism of the Budget, this is what he is adopting.

2345 There is no question of union involvement having stopped a couple of *enchufes*; far from it, Madam Speaker. None of this takes away from the fact that I think the hon. Gentleman is a lovely fellow but having seen what I have seen and what I am going to go on to analyse, I would not buy the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* from him if he knocked on my door, let alone give him my vote so that he could run the public finances of my community. This idea that union involvement has stopped a couple of *enchufes* of jobs for the boys is just them rerunning the 1996 General Election 2350 campaign because it is the one they won. Actually, the Minister has gone back and looked. The attempt to get somebody promoted, which the Minister referred, was actually from one of their boys, a relative of one of their officials who made no secret of the fact that they are one of their officials – because we do not discriminate whether you are GSD or GSLP; if you need help, you need help – who sought elevation outside of the mechanisms for application for filling a particular post. I am not going to reveal it across the floor of the House but I will show him the material, because I am sure the Minister can share it with him, because they will know exactly who it is. The job was for one of their boys, and our boys stopped it because it was not being done through the right procedure. So, this idea that the GSD have to stop the GSLP from doing jobs for the boys is not true. It is nonsense. It is the opposite of the truth, like everything they say. They pretend to 2360 be one thing when, in fact, it is the opposite. I commend the Minister for the way that he acted in this case, which he has been able to refer to me. We do not care which party you belong to. We help you if you are a Gibraltarian. That is it. His speech was really just a collection of clichés, again the sorts of clichés that poison the well for all politicians and all of politics. This is not us sitting around on an evening with a cigar and a whisky talking about clichés; this is Parliament, to come 2365 with facts and figures.

He says they are committed to affordable housing and we have not done enough. Facts and figures. Affordable housing 1988-96 commissioned by the GSLP, 2,442. That is eight years. What about the 16 years from 1996 to 2011-12? Eight hundred and one. Who cares about affordable housing and houses for our people? The 12 years that we have been in government: 2,141 flats
2370 commissioned. Those are the facts, old chap.

He then says, 'You say you are going to build 3,000 homes: that is extra sewage.' Well, yes, there will be more Gibraltarians, but really what we are dealing with is moving Gibraltarians. It is the same amount of sewage being moved in different directions. 'But you have to invest in sewerage,' he says, 'Even though it is not visible, this is infrastructure and you must invest in the
2375 infrastructure, even though you cannot see it and it is not shiny.' Who is he preaching to? Does he not check the figures? In there, in that room are all of the numbers. It is not that I have the numbers myself; they are here. In fact, these cupboards contain all the old Estimates Books and it is now online. Does he know how much was invested in infrastructure between 1988 and 1996, in particular sewerage infrastructure? No? He hasn't checked? He hasn't gone to the I&D pages of
2380 the old Estimates Books to work it out? I will tell him, Madam Speaker: £4 million, eight years, an average of £½ million a year. Eighteen million more was invested in the infrastructure for the reclamation. So, £4 million in the existing infrastructure, new infrastructure £18 million, right – 1988-96, the administration of Joe Bossano. In 1997 to 2011, the administration of the GSD, £3.9 million, an average of £243,000 a year, half of the main amount and nothing compared to
2385 the investment in new infrastructure. The Hon. Mr Sacarello is absolutely right, you have to invest in infrastructure even though it is not shiny. We did it and they did half. What about the period from 2012 to 2024? Did he check those numbers before he came to attack me? They are there, in the cupboard behind him. *(Interjection)* They are online as well. All the Estimates Books since 1997 are online – the most transparent and accountable Government in the history of Gibraltar – and they do not even know it is there. Remarkable. I will take it from the silence from a sedentary
2390 position, Madam Speaker, which is absolutely the correct parliamentary position to take, that he has not checked before he has opened his mouth to make an accusation that we were not investing, that actually in the period 2012-24 we have invested in infrastructure £36 million, £12 million alone in sewerage infrastructure. So, the Bossano administration £4 million in eight
2395 years, the Caruana administration just shy of £4 million in 16 years, the Picardo administration in sewerage £12 million in 12 years, and on general infrastructure £36 million, with £30 million still to spend on the Eastside. We have invested much more than they ever invested. There is an Excel sheet with all of this information, where I have extracted the information for him from the Estimates Book so that he can see the point, so that next time he comes to this House to make a
2400 point it is a point worth making, because this is not us sitting around with a whisky and a cigar and saying the first thing that comes to our mind, old chap; it is about the serious matter of the investment of the public finances of Gibraltar, which are the responsibility of the Government because they primarily are the fruits of taxation.

Madam Speaker, in that context, when he talks about no strategy for diversification, there is
2405 so much of a strategy for diversification that I do not think anybody in this House wants me to go through it. How can he say that we are borrowing from public borrowing to the detriment and not to the benefit of our children and the tourism product? He said that. He said those words. How can he say that? We have given them every school in Gibraltar new, or refurbished – the only one, St Joseph's, yes? – a Children's Primary Care Centre which did not exist before, a new Skywalk and
2410 a new Skybridge, just to address children and tourism product, which he says we are not investing in. How can he say we are not investing in our children and our tourism product and that we have a diminishing asset base? We have an increasing asset base. That is the whole point. When Mr Clinton says, 'You are spending the money and we do not know where it is,' I say, 'There it is, in the assets – the schools, all of the other assets. There it is.' We do not have a diminishing asset
2415 base. In fact, does he know that they are the ones who sold the family silver? Or does he not know that instead of borrowing against an asset, they decided to sell assets? They decided to sell all of the post-war stock; that is sell, alienate. They gave away the family silver. If these are the things

he is complaining about, he joined the wrong party. In the same way as he did not do his research before coming here to give his speech, if he had done his research before going into politics he would have joined us and not them if he was genuinely concerned about these things.

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Now is the time to listen to our people, he says. Well, Madam Speaker, we are listening, we always are, but they spoke nine months ago in an orderly and proper manner.

Yes, there are power cuts, but I have a table of power cuts, which can be circulated, which shows that actually there are many fewer power cuts now than there ever were before. Perhaps there will always be power cuts, but there will be less. The record for the year with the fewest power cuts was actually 2016, when we only had one. The record for the year with the most power cuts was in my time, in 2013, when we had 56. Do you know why? Because the power station which I inherited from them blew up. I was having lunch on Easter Sunday, or Good Friday, (**A Member:** Easter Sunday.) and took a call that the power station had blown up. I do not know whether he remembers but we had an almost complete extinction event. I am happy for these to be circulated, if hon. Members want, so they can have the statistics. This is empirical stuff: many fewer power cuts now than in their time, apart from that year when the power station blew up and we were trying to recover from it the year after.

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Madam Speaker, in that context it was almost a pleasure to hear the Hon. Mr Reyes get up and start talking for all of us when he was talking about the unity of the Gibraltarian and how we would not be shifted on the things that really matter for us. He got a magnificent clamour of support from this side of the House because we all believe in what he was saying when he started his speech. Where we cannot agree with him is when he talks about the complement of teachers, because he seems to have forgotten that the complement of teachers in 2011 was 299 and now it is 472.

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On the National Theatre, the reason he did not get much from us on that is because it is very clear it is being done by a private trust, so there are no numbers in these Estimates which deal with that. But, in any event, there will be provision for those who now rely on the smaller theatres. There is a lot of data that I will happily give him, that has been prepared by my colleague. I will just hand it to him so I do not have to keep the House in going through the issues which are deep educational issues that he and the Minister exchange views on, Madam Speaker.

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The thing that I find very difficult from him is his support from the GFA without supporting the GFA. So, yes to the GFA but no to support of the GFA. And yet, I do not know whether he wants to forget but the booklet that he stood for election under in 2015 has them developing the GFA stadium at Victoria – *them* – with taxpayers' money. So, now he says, 'We support the GFA, but no taxpayers' money,' but he stood for election with a programme that said they would fund the GFA stadium. Additionally, there are a number of in-depth responses to the things that he raised about Europa, which I will happily share with him, which the Minister for Sport has given me to respond to him but I do not think I need to keep him by responding to him on my feet.

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Madam Speaker, they have said that they are going to vote against the Bill, and that is their prerogative but it is a real pity because people will only be paid if this Bill passes this House. We have a majority of one, which is enough, but it is a pity that we cannot at least agree to pay salaries and then disagree about everything else. When I was there, I used to say, 'I do not agree with how they are going to spend the money, but' as the Leader of the Opposition had taught me, 'Gibraltar must have an appropriation and therefore we will support the Bill so that the salaries can be paid.'

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I am very sorry that they are not going to do that, because I have no doubt that the mechanisms that we are using in this Estimates Book are exactly the same mechanisms that have been used for generations in respect of public finance in Gibraltar. They used them, we use them and we use them in the same way that they used them. When they use them it is fine and worth supporting and when we use them it is terrible and should be voted against. That is really not a way to run, in our view, the approach to politics and public finances. You cannot love this country just when you win and you cannot care about the public servants of this country and them having the finance that they need just when you win. You have to always care. You cannot just say that company borrowing is okay when you are the Government and that company borrowing is not okay when

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2470 you are the Opposition. It does not wash. You cannot say that company debt is bad when we are in government but fine when you are in government. That is just not serious.

I get it that the hon. Gentleman is setting himself up, every day that passes, in the normal way of any Leader of the Opposition after an election loss – in his case, the fourth the successive general election loss – when you say to the electorate, in the words of ABBA, ‘If you change your mind, I’m the first in line.’ I get it, Madam Speaker, but the election was last year. The public trusted us to return to government, to prudently continue the management of their affairs.

In the presentation of these numbers and these policies on Monday, I made a mistake. We have rescinded that mistake. We are ready to put this public finance Bill to the Parliament so that it enjoys sufficient support that every one of our public servants can have the financing that they need to do their jobs – our teachers, our nurses, our policemen – and it would be a real pity if they only get paid at the end of this month because we vote that they should and hon. Members opposite vote that they should not, which would be the effect of the Bill not passing. The Hon. Mr Bossino has voted four times for this Bill and four times against, not really caring about the consistency that his vote represents. By the time the Hon. Mr Azopardi was elected to this House, Mr Clinton’s infection, in terms of voting against, had already caught in the GSD and all hon. Members who are new will likely be whipped to vote against. Mr Reyes I think has voted four times for in opposition and six times against, or something – who cares, because consistency has never been their forte, but it has always been ours. If we were sitting where they are sitting now, if they were presenting an Appropriation Bill, even though we might disagree with how they might spend the money we would vote for the spending and continue to try to persuade people to put us in charge of the purse strings, which is exactly what we did in October last year. We won that general election with a small margin sufficient to ensure that for the fourth successive term and for the 13th successive year it would be our presentation of this Appropriation Bill that would be the one that would go forward.

2495 For all of those reasons and each of them that I have presented in the time that I spent presenting the Second Reading on Monday and today, rowing back from the measure on the pollution levy, which is now dead and buried and which was a mistake, I nonetheless commend the Bill to the House. *(Banging on desks)*

2500 **Madam Speaker:** I now put the question, which is that a Bill for an Act to appropriate sums of money to the service of the year ending on the 31st day of March 2025 be read a second time. Those in favour? **(Several Members: Aye).** Those against?

Hon. Chief Minister: Let’s have a division, Madam Speaker.

A division was called for and voting resulted as follows:

FOR

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez
 Hon. J J Bossano
 Hon. L M Bruzon
 Hon. Prof J E Cortes
 Hon. N Feetham
 Hon. J J Garcia
 Hon. P A Orfila
 Hon. F R Picardo
 Hon. C P Santos

AGAINST

Hon. Dr K Azopardi
 Hon. D J Bossino
 Hon. R M Clinton
 Hon. J Ladislaus
 Hon. G Origo
 Hon. E J Reyes
 Hon. C A Sacarello
 Hon. A Sanchez

2505 **Madam Speaker:** Thank you. The question is carried, 9 to 8 in favour of yes.

Adjournment

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, I move that the House should now adjourn until Tuesday at 9.30 in the morning, to take the Committee Stage and Third Reading.

Madam Speaker: I now propose the question, which is that this House do now adjourn to Tuesday at 9.30 a.m.

I now put the question, which is that this House do now adjourn to Tuesday at 9.30 a.m. Those in favour? (**Members:** Aye). Those against? Passed. This House will now adjourn to Tuesday at 9.30 a.m.

The House adjourned at 3.45 p.m.