



PROCEEDINGS OF THE GIBRALTAR PARLIAMENT

AFTERNOON SESSION: 3 p.m. – 7.30 p.m.

Gibraltar, Thursday, 4th July 2024

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The Gibraltar Parliament

The Parliament met at 3 p.m.

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

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

Standing Order 7(1) suspended to proceed with laying of document

Clerk: Meeting of Parliament, Thursday, 4th July 2024.
Suspension of Standing Orders. The Hon. the Chief Minister.

5

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, I beg to move under Standing Order 7(3) to suspend Standing Order 7(1) to proceed with the laying of documents on the table.

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

PAPERS TO BE LAID

10

Clerk: Papers to be laid. The Hon. the Chief Minister.

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, I have the honour to lay on the table the Annual Report for the Gibraltar Regulatory Authority for the year ended 31st March 2024 and the audited accounts of the Gibraltar Regulatory Authority for the year ended 31st March 2024.

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Madam Speaker: Ordered to lie.

The Appropriation Act 2024 — Second Reading — Debate concluded

Clerk: Second Reading of the Appropriation Bill 2024. Continued.

Madam Speaker: The Hon. L M Bruzon.

20

Minister for Industrial Relations, Civil Contingencies and Sport (Hon. L M Bruzon): Madam Speaker, as I rise today to give my first Budget speech, I am reminded of the Chief Minister's words last year when he reminded Members of Parliament that our time here is a privilege and ought not to be taken for granted.

25

Madam Speaker, October 2023 was a turning point in the lives of many of us, not only on this side of the House but also for the Opposition benches. Elections can be ruthless, Madam Speaker, especially in such a small community. They can be merciless not only in those standing for election,

but worse still on families and loved ones. A very special mention goes to loved ones, partners and our respective children, who often have to bear the sharp end of our choices to join public life. But join public life we did, despite knowing of the inevitable consequences, because we all
30 felt that we could make a difference to our community.

Madam Speaker, during the 2023 election month, we reminded our tiny but beautiful nation of our accomplishments over the last 12 years: new school, boats marina, a new primary care centre, national bank, university and so on. But I will not pretend to take credit for any of those
35 incredible achievements, as I have spent the last 20 years in the background as an executive member of the Liberal Party.

Today, Madam Speaker, it is with enormous pride that I present this snapshot of my ministerial portfolio, what has happened and what we aim to achieve over the next financial year.

I would like to commence with the AFRS. The Airport Fire and Rescue Service has, during the
40 past financial year, gone through a period of significant staff renewal, which arose from several retirements which necessitated new entrants to be engaged and trained to ensure business continuity. Over the past four months, a total of five new firefighters have been accepted into the AFRS.

Also linked to the retirements and following rigorous selection board processes, a number of
45 promotions took place across all operational ranks. Enhancing the staffs' skills and knowledge to develop its operational output is at the ethos of the AFRS, and in this respect a considerable number of training courses were attended across all levels during this period.

Numerous firefighters and officers undertook courses to either qualify, rectify or gain an
50 instructor qualification in disciplines such as chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear responses, incident command, aviation firefighting, breathing apparatus instructors and joint service programme instructors. All of these resulting in accredited qualifications.

Officers also attended various aviation fire and rescue industry-specific events abroad, which provide excellent opportunities to network with industry professionals from across UK airports and beyond.

Additionally, beyond the confines of the airfield, the AFRS supported several multi-agency
55 exercises throughout Gibraltar, participating collaboratively with partner agencies. Working closely with the Office of Civil Contingencies, it actively participates in emergency planning forums, dynamically contributing to develop and test Gibraltar's resilience to face any eventuality.

The AFRS also continues to work very closely with the GFRS, Gibraltar Fire and Rescue Service,
60 collaborating on training and other projects of mutual benefit, all of which contribute positively to the safety of our community.

During this financial year, the AFRS was scrutinised by inspectors from both the Defence Fire Service and the Civil Aviation Authority. These audits provided further assurance that the AFRS is performing and delivering a service in compliance with UK and international mandated aviation
65 regulations, and standards confirming that its personnel manning and resources are sufficient to safely fulfil its expected operational response.

Ensuring the welfare of its staff is a fundamental duty of care for the AFRS. In this respect, a number of infrastructural improvements have been undertaken within the fire station to ensure its facilities meet the current operational and welfare risks required. These will continue to be
70 phased in during the next few years.

As a lean and multifaceted unit, the small but dynamic AFRS team strives for organisational and individual self-improvement, ensuring its firefighters are equipped with the tools and resources to safely and effectively perform the critical and ever-evolving challenges expected of them.

Madam Speaker, moving on to the Gibraltar Fire and Rescue Service. The GFRS is an
75 organisation that prides itself on setting high standards of performance in the service provided to our community. With the development and review of fire safety standards across the globe, particularly in the UK, and continued innovative fire solutions, the GFRS fire safety team is

80 constantly challenged and does a magnificent job in anticipation of risks subsequently contributing to front-line operational preparedness.

The GFRS continues with attempts to develop and achieve short- and long-term goals.

85 A number of ongoing matters include an overhaul and modernisation of breathing apparatus, which will be carried out in the next financial year. Senior management is currently reviewing GFRS resources aligned to UK National Operation Guidelines and Gibraltar's risk elements. Once adequate numbers have been determined, HMGoG will work with the GFRS accordingly.

With regard to software, Madam Speaker, significant progress has been made with the local service provider to develop and modernise internal systems. The main objective is to improve efficiency in emergency response and day-to-day working practices.

90 The restructure of the GFRS was recently approved by my office, and senior management are now in the process of implementing the various phases. This will include the introduction of a dedicated training department.

Temporary promotions have taken place on a rotational basis, with a view to provide all potential candidates with an equal opportunity to progress through the ranks. With the recent transfer of the Ambulance Service to the GHA have come several changes in protocols, training content and responsibilities. That said, the fire control operators will maintain a level of emergency response training to provide resiliency, if required.

100 Madam Speaker, with a year average of over 500 building applications, the GFRS continues to liaise with Building Control to ensure that new builds comply with standards of fire safety. Now more than ever, we must ensure that buildings provide assistance to our front-line responders to safeguard fire crews and residents. The GFRS are in the process of consulting with Building Control to manage fees for fire safety consultations as part of the Building Control process. Also under review, Madam Speaker, with the Government law officers, are the petroleum licence fees, with a likely change during the course of this financial year following consultation with myself and my colleague, Minister Cortes. This will most likely move to a system of fees based on quantities and risks.

105 Madam Speaker, the recently appointed firefighter, Mr Neil Wink, has completed his 15-week firefighter development course in the UK. This will be followed by another eight weeks of intense and locally-conducted training in rope rescue, diver search and rescue, emergency response driving, emergency medical response and other aspects of GFRS responsibilities.

110 The GFRS senior management continue to review its current legal framework to align it with the roles and responsibilities of a modern-day fire and rescue service.

Madam Speaker, with relation to mental health, the new Head of Welfare, Divisional Officer, Mr Adrian McComb, continues to work hard with the GFRS counsellor and well-being champions to ensure support mechanisms with clear policies and guidance.

115 The Chief Fire Officer recently carried out a review of the GFRS through an independent inspector, Mr Phil Cox. This has highlighted a number of issues that senior management are already working on, mainly to do with data capturing through the development of technology.

120 Two 17-year-old support vehicles are being replaced with electric vehicles. The main function of these vehicles is to serve duty officer deployment to the fireground as well as to aid the fire safety team to perform their daily responsibilities.

Madam Speaker, with relation to the new fire station, we are working on an exciting project for a new home for the GFRS. A presentation of the concept design has been made to the GFRS staff and this has been well received by all.

125 With regard to facilities training, we are working on the enhancement of the existing training facilities. The new facility will provide our firefighters with the minimum expected training of breathing apparatus, heat exposure, compartment fire behaviour and ship firefighting, among other elements of specialist responsibilities. We are working with Gibdock for a potential bespoke facility built locally. Furthermore, a purposely built facility will help enhance the ability to respond to MoD assets, primarily the Royal Navy.

130 Ship firefighting, high-rise firefighting, compartment firefighting behaviour and search and rescue in heat and humidity are elements of GFRS responsibilities where training is currently undertaken in the UK at a cost.

Madam Speaker, with regard to an aerial ladder, research has been undertaken and practical tests have been carried out locally with the two main suppliers. HMGoG has committed to the purchase of an aerial ladder platform for the GFRS. The GFRS continue to liaise with members of the UK Resilience Framework with a view to have added support as part of the response to incidents involving collapsed structures, rockfall and earthquakes.

Madam Speaker, the GFRS continue to form a vital part of Gibraltar's ongoing development as a modern and safe community, with significant involvement in major projects, public events and residential developments. The aim of their involvement in these projects is not only to familiarise themselves with potential risks, but also to ensure their new builds comply with fire protection and safety standards, aimed at saving lives and assisting fire service operations.

Finally, Madam Speaker, the GFRS, in partnership with HMGoG, will continue to be fully committed to working effortlessly in fire prevention and protection, and the maintenance of an effective response to a wide range of potential incidents, with one overarching aim: to safeguard our community.

It is nevertheless vital that we continue to support our front-line firefighters, who are the most exposed to risk, by ensuring that we provide them with the tools necessary to perform effectively on the fireground and maintain their skills at the highest possible level.

150 Madam Speaker, I will now cover my responsibilities under industrial relations, a matter for which, for obvious reasons, has always been close to my heart. My background as a trade unionist previously discharging convener duty roles gives me the necessary insight to understand the interplay between unions and the public sector, and the unions and the community as a whole.

Unions play an important role in our day-to-day lives. Sometimes this is evident as disputes arise and play out in public, whereas other times their influence is more indirect, such as their impact on policy-making behind the scenes as a pre-eminent stakeholder. This Administration places the Government-union relationship at the heart of its business and will continue to do so, despite any disagreements that we may have from time to time.

160 Whilst it is true that the current financial climate still requires a degree of financial prudence and responsibility, there are matters that the Government has been able to square, such as those related to Gibraltar Bus Company, HM Prison and others. There are other areas to which Government hopes to bring a resolution in due course.

The ministry that I lead will be sensitive to the views and needs of the unions in Gibraltar and will continue to work hand-in-hand with them to address issues they raise whenever these are justified.

Madam Speaker, the Minister with overall responsibility for the public service is the Chief Minister. I have nonetheless inherited from my predecessor matters concerning the revision and modernisation of the Public Sector Code, commonly known as General Orders.

170 This is the manifesto commitment which I am keen to fulfil. The incumbent Director of Personnel and Development, together with his staff, are building on the blocks which were established during Stephen Linares' stewardship of industrial relations.

The current document is obsolete in many respects. It currently underpins the Civil Service, the Gibraltar Development Corporation, as well as many other agencies, Government-owned companies and authorities in one form or another. The objective is for the rebranded and reinvigorated Public Sector Code to meet the needs of the 21st century public sector; the springboard for its future success. I am keen to resolve this where the urgency requires.

180 Madam Speaker, I move on to my responsibility for the King's Bastion Leisure Centre. I am delighted to share the remarkable progress and success that the King's Bastion Leisure Centre – KBLC – has achieved over the past year. In 2023, the Centre continued to operate effectively, with an impressive increase in revenue of 7% over the previous year. This marks the most profitable year to date for KBLC, a testament to the hard work and dedication of the staff and management.

A significant portion of this revenue – about one-third – was generated from the most popular attraction, which are the bowling lanes.

185 Alongside the bowling lanes, the fitness gym and the amusement arcade remained top attractions, drawing in many visitors and adding to the revenue streams. The amusement arcade in particular saw exciting developments in 2023, with the addition of five new arcade games. It now boasts a total of 63 machines offering a wide variety of entertainment options for our young visitors.

190 Other streams such as the Boulder Park, the popular Cannonball store and the room rentals also performed well throughout the year. The Boulder Park in particular saw climbing routes changed twice in the year, utilising a professional route-setting team from the UK. This ensures that our climbing routes remain challenging and varied, keeping our users engaged and excited to return.

195 The Cannonball Store introduced the sale of comics and collector editions, a category that had been long absent from our Gibraltar newsagents.

Among the many events hosted, the 15th anniversary celebration of the Centre's inauguration stood out as a highlight. This event attracted a record number of visitors and showcased the community's continued support and enthusiasm for the Centre. The management team at KBLC set ambitious targets for increasing revenue and reduced the overrunning costs of the Centre.

200 I am proud to report that these targets have once again been successfully achieved. This accomplishment not only underscores the commitment to operational efficiency but also ensures that the Centre remains a vibrant community hub.

As we look ahead, we remain dedicated to further enhancing the offerings and experiences of the King's Bastion Leisure Centre.

205 In conclusion, I want to express my heartfelt gratitude to the dedicated staff and management team and the community for their unwavering support. The success of the KBLC is a collective achievement and it is the community's enthusiasm and participation that drives us to keep improving and innovating. I look forward to another successful and exciting year in the King's Bastion Leisure Centre.

210 Madam Speaker, I now move on to civil contingencies. Recent global events underscore the critical importance of security and resilience. From the war in Ukraine, conflicts in Israel and Palestine, and attacks on vessels in the Red Sea, to international terrorism, state-sponsored cyberattacks and climate change, our world is increasingly volatile. These challenges remind us of our collective responsibility to prepare for every eventuality.

215 In Gibraltar, the last few years have highlighted our own vulnerabilities. We have faced COVID-19, the OS 35 collision, the Gas Venus oil spill, and a fire at Power's Drive Tunnel that disrupted our water supply. These incidents are stark reminders that disasters can and do happen close to home. The Office of Civil Contingencies plays a pivotal role in enhancing Gibraltar's resilience by collaborating with emergency services, Government Departments, agencies, the military and other key partners, who ensure that our preparedness and ability to effectively respond to and recover from emergencies.

220 As a cornerstone of the Gibraltar Contingency Council and its Executive Committee, the Office of Civil Contingencies co-ordinates much of the emergency planning work through six joint tactical groups. These groups focus on air, land, maritime, cyber, health and social care, and critical national infrastructure. Over the past 12 months, significant progress has been made in these areas. The Gibraltar National Security Risk Assessment has been updated, providing a comprehensive understanding of the risks of the landscape. This crucial document informs our risk management decisions, identifies vulnerabilities, and drives the development of multi-agency emergency response plans.

230 We have developed and maintained risk-based multi-agency response plans, including Major Incident Response Plan, Marauding Terrorist Attack Plan, CBRN Response Plan, Upper Rock Nature Reserve Fire Plan, Cybersecurity Plan and Mass Casualty Plan. Site-specific plans have also been created for various critical locations, ensuring preparedness across the board.

235 The ongoing EU Treaty negotiations and associated non-negotiated outcome planning work is a priority. The Office of Civil Contingency supports the Deputy Chief Minister in mitigating potential impacts and has conducted numerous tabletop exercises for Government Departments, agencies and business organisations. The Trauma Risk Management Policy, launched in September 2023, is another key achievement and is now an established pan-Government policy, sitting under the Department of Personnel and Development.

240 TRiM managers and practitioners were qualified throughout 2023, and further training is planned to ensure that appropriate levels are maintained in the first responding organisations. This policy ensures that our first responders receive the necessary support with ongoing training to maintain appropriate levels. Training and exercising remains paramount.

245 The Office of Civil Contingencies has led numerous multi-agency training events and exercises, ensuring that our responders are well-prepared for any major incident. These efforts include testing response for a marauding terrorist attack, LNG emergency, and air emergency. Event Safety Advisory Group, led by the Office of Civil Contingencies, play a crucial role in ensuring public safety during events.

250 The significant investment in Gibraltar's Geographical Information System – GIS – continues to be made. A bespoke incident management platform improves situational awareness across all agencies and at every level of command.

Civil Contingencies facilitates the training for GIS operators and the system assists commanders in gaining a better understanding of the incident they are faced with.

255 The Government owns an integrated, automated and centralised IT system to collect, store and process data regarding people, vehicle, vessel, and aircraft movements in and out of Gibraltar via land, sea and air for the purposes of law enforcement, known as the National Security Centralised Intelligence System.

260 The Office of Civil Contingencies acts as co-ordinator for the Government's law enforcement agencies and chairs the NSCIS Working Group. The system is a key component to our security infrastructure.

In conclusion, our commitment to resilience and preparedness is unwavering. Through the dedicated efforts of the Office of Civil Contingencies and its partners, we continue to enhance Gibraltar's security, ensuring that we are ready to face any challenges that may come our way.

265 Madam Speaker, I will now continue with my aerial responsibility as Minister for Sports and Leisure. Locally, and as per usual, league programmes and development initiatives were completed as brilliantly as always by the army of volunteers who organise and run them. Participation levels are once again up and both the Bayside and sports complexes have been extremely busy and are a sight to behold when at full capacity.

270 In its second operational year, or sporting season should I say, Lathbury has become the main facility for both the athletics and swimming associations. In addition, the Gibraltar Triathlon Association and the Gibraltar Football Association, among others, are also regular users of the facility, with the schools and Special Olympics holding their sports days and national games at the complex. In relation to GASA and the GAAAs specifically, both sporting bodies have now established their training and competitive programmes. They can now plan and welcome visitors, with GASA having hosted visitors for the first time in several years.

275 Additionally, the Gibraltar Amateur Athletics Association has recently hosted the Athletics Championships of the Small States of Europe. The capability of the facility, which amongst other things includes fixed installations for electronic timing, have made this a reality.

280 Other than the recent Island Games, one recently has to cast the mind back to the last time an athletics event of this standard was held locally. This has been made possible by not only the hard work of the athletics fraternity, but also because of the unprecedented investment in sporting infrastructure undertaken by the GSLP Liberal Government.

285 The Lathbury swimming pool, which for a short period of time was only accessible to members of GASA and the Gibraltar Triathlon Association, is now accessible to the general public and has been for a number of months.

The recruitment of six extra pool operatives at the turn of the year has allowed manning levels to be met, thus offering public swim time in a similar safe environment to that enjoyed at the GASA Swimming Pool Complex on Europort Avenue.

290 Bookings have become very popular and have been easier to obtain than ever before. Implementation of online booking systems at all GSLA facilities now means that swimmers or those, for example, wanting to enjoy a game of padel tennis can book from the smartphone, tablet or other electronic devices. It is important to note that bookings can still be done through the GSLA's counters or over the phone.

295 Madam Speaker, we cannot only concentrate on the new venues. I believe it is safe to say that, apart from schools, sporting facilities are those most utilised by our children and young adults. Given the positive health effects of exercise on many fronts, it is important to continue to maintain high standards so that those wishing to avail themselves of this service can do so in the knowledge that they have safe and adequate facilities.

300 Rolling maintenance was an area that needed reviewing, and I am glad to report that this is being addressed effectively and quickly. Unfortunately, facilities do have a shelf life, and we need to address this also. As an example, pitches three and four at the Bayside Sports Complex were both resurfaced during the last financial year, at a cost of £68,153.35.

305 Next in line are the hockey pitches, with a tender for the resurfacing recently being issued. Their longevity is a testament to the hard-working team at the GSLA, who have kept this facility to international standards for at least a decade longer than any similar facility anywhere else in Europe. Just as with the football pitches, however, they have stretched the limit. This facility has only recently hosted another Euro hockey tournament, and by design the new surface with periphery works will continue to be considered as a host venue for similar events in future.

310 This commitment shows how crucial participation in international events is both home and abroad. We continue to advocate that all those who are full or affiliate members of their international governing bodies, need to be active within their international frameworks. Given this, the GSLA continues to support associations on many levels, not least financially.

315 To this end, the financial support received in the last financial year by sports associations was £346,533.97. This figure represents support offered to registered associations for participation at international events, sports development initiatives and minor improvements to facilities. Applications were received and painstakingly scrutinised by the Gibraltar Sports Advisory Council. I would like to take this opportunity to thank those voluntary members of GSAC who work very hard for very little recognition, if any.

320 It has been my first year as Chair of GSAC, and I must be honest and admit that I was unaware of the magnitude of what happens behind the scenes. The process ensures that associations themselves vote for experienced and knowledgeable members of our community to safeguard their interests.

325 Given the dynamic nature of sport, the criteria and policies are constantly under review. Many thanks to them, in particular, Madam Speaker, to Mr John Gonçalves, who has been a continuous member of GSAC since its inception in 1974.

Madam Speaker, event-led tourism continues to be an area where we, as a Government, continue to promote on many levels, not least in the sports and leisure sector. As a result, we have repeat customers and Gibraltar continues to be considered an excellent host, resulting in many events of an international standard being held locally.

330 European and world-governing bodies continue to entrust Gibraltar with the staging of events that are on their international calendars.

335 Aside from the obvious benefits to our local sports people, this policy also puts visitors in local hotels, promotes visitors eating and drinking in local bars and restaurants, and shopping in local establishments, as well as visiting tourist sites. We continue to be the standard-bearer for such initiatives, and the hard work of our volunteers in this regard cannot be underestimated.

The following list is not exhaustive, but shows some of the main events held locally during 2023-24 financial year. Madam Speaker, we had the Gibraltar International Backgammon

Tournament, Classic Car Rally, Euro Hockey Club Challenge II, Harley-Davidson Rally, the Junior Darts Corporation World Championships, Squash International Open, European Cricket Network
340 T10 Tournament, Europe Under-17 Open Challenge, Eurafrica Trail, and International Rugby 7s. These and other events are supported logistically and financially in different levels. From a financial standpoint, the support offered to these events to cover contractual obligations, set up and logistics totalled £168,881.34.

We have become more selective in the events that we choose. By doing so, we are providing a
345 better and more efficient return for the taxpayers. Many of these events will take place again during the current financial year. As previously stated, we have already hosted the Athletics Championships of the Small States of Europe, but to this we need to add the FIBA Europe Under-16 Women's Euro Basket Division C, which will be happening now in July, and the UCI Mountain Bike event which will be happening in October this year.

350 Madam Speaker, it would be a disservice to speak about the hosting of international events without mentioning the Netball Youth World Cup that will be hosted in Gibraltar in September 2025. Gibraltar will host between 450 to 600 players from all corners of the Commonwealth, with fans, media and dignitaries also expected to attend.

The wheels are truly in motion, with both the Executive Board and the Organising Committee
355 working hard to ensure that all arrangements and responsibilities under the Hosting Agreement are met. Following the public launch of the event in February, in March 2024 the hosting of the European Netball Under-17 Open Championships took place. The tournament served as a test event for the forthcoming World Cup. This was the first time that two venues, namely the Tercentenary Sports Hall and the Europa Sports Hall, had been used simultaneously. This tested
360 communication, logistics, transport and scheduling, amongst other things.

The visiting World Netball delegation with whom I met were extremely satisfied and confident that Gibraltar would be able to deliver on its commitments. I have to personally thank the hardworking staff of the GSLA who were present at *both* sites and ensured the success of the event.

365 Madam Speaker, parks and playgrounds also fall under my area of responsibility with these being looked after by the GSLA. In the last financial year, the maintenance programme undertaken by the GJBS crew in conjunction with the GSLA team continues, and the effects of the work undertaken are becoming very noticeable.

Maintenance has now become more proactive, and when items do become damaged, as they
370 inevitably do, reaction times for repairs have decreased significantly. The rolling maintenance programme is seasonal and based on usage trends; however, all areas are checked regularly to ensure that they are safe. The total cost of this in the last financial year was £210,145.64.

It is at this point that I do have to unfortunately report that we are suffering regular spates of
375 vandalism to park and playground equipment. These areas are frequented daily by Gibraltar's children and equipment is damaged intentionally on far too regular a basis and for no reason whatsoever. As a community, we must not fall into this trap. Ultimately, public funds, our money, goes into addressing these spates of vandalism.

In addition to the maintenance programme, the Moorish Castle playground was relocated. The park was re-provided in another area within the estate at a cost of £70,603.92. Other parks and
380 playgrounds have also received specific equipment upgrades, with a total in the last financial year for this being £73,944.65.

Madam Speaker, summer 2023 was a particularly busy period with both the Bathing Pavilion and the Europa Pool, with maintenance and upgrades to both amenities being undertaken to facilitate this. The overall cost for maintenance was as follows: GSLA Bathing Pavilion,
385 £156,771.46; and the Europa Pool, £41,106.75. These figures account for cleaning, maintenance and repairs, including the services of divers required before, during and after the summer season.

While the summer season lasts approximately 14 weeks, these areas need to be looked at or looked after all year round.

390 Both facilities have now become staples for those who do not wish to or cannot access our
beaches. Both are fully accessible and cater for those members of our community with mobility
issues.

Madam Speaker, the Summer Sports Programme made up of Sports Train and Stay and Play
programme continues to bridge the gap between the normally quiet summer months of the year.
Now in 25th and 15th year respectively, the schemes continue to go from strength to strength.
395 Madam Speaker, the 2023 GSLA Sports Dream Programme experienced tremendous success and
made significant improvements to enhance participation and inclusivity.

The decision to shift the start time to 9 a.m. and implement online registrations proved to be
instrumental in achieving a record number of registrations, exceeding 800 participants, of
which 30 declared the need for additional support. Partnering with Possibilities to support
400 children from the LSF Unit further underscores the programme's commitment to accessibility and
integration, providing crucial support for the initiative's success.

Additionally, 24 individuals completed the Level 1 Community Sports Leadership Award, and
subsequently volunteered for the programme for the remainder of the summer. The Family Fun
evenings remained constantly successful, drawing in large numbers of families.

405 The use of the Lathbury Sports Complex for the first time not only breathed new life into the
programme, but also provided a central and accessible location for activities, enhancing the
overall experience for participants. Expanding the range of sports offered, including new games
like ultimate frisbee, track and field events, and swimming, undoubtedly broadened the appeal of
the programme, catering to a diverse range of interests among the participants.

410 Overall, the 2023 GSLA Sports Train programme's success can be attributed to its proactive
approach to addressing barriers of participation, its expansion of sports offerings, and its strategic
use of facilities to create a vibrant and inclusive environment for children of all backgrounds and
abilities.

Integrated well-being workshops and assisting well-being leads within each group further
415 demonstrates a commitment to supporting the holistic development of the young leaders who
assume a great responsibility throughout the programme. This year, the programme will also be
starting at the early time of 9 a.m., to align with school schedules, ensuring a smooth transition
for participants and maximising their engagement from the outset.

However, Madam Speaker, the Summer Sports Programme are not the only tasks that the
420 GSLA's Sports Development Unit undertake during the year. Aside from regulating and assisting
sports associations throughout the year and assisting new associations, the Sports Development
Unit is actively involved in delivering safeguarding training.

During the last financial year, 348 coaches and volunteers have undertaken safeguarding
training, meaning that there are now a total of 673 individuals who have an active safeguarding
425 certificate.

The subject of child protection must be and is at the forefront of everything that is done in
relation to children and young people and their participation in sports and leisure. However,
enforcement has to align with education, and during the last year scores of unannounced
safeguarding spot checks have taken place by GSLA staff.

430 Madam Speaker, I would like to end my contribution on sports and leisure by mentioning the
GSLA staff. It has been just over eight months since I became Minister, and it has been a pleasure
to get to know them and to see what they do day in, day out from a different perspective. We
have had very constructive meetings and morale is high, something which I will vow to help
maintain. I need to thank them all for being so open and welcoming. It is a pleasure and an honour
435 to work with them.

Madam Speaker, in concluding, I cannot explain how proud I am to present my first Budget
speech. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the members of staff who work within
every ministry for which I hold ministerial portfolios.

440 I would also like to thank you and your staff here in Parliament for the help and assistance
given to fulfil my parliamentary obligations. But, Madam Speaker, I could not end my budget

speech without specifically mentioning the staff at the ministry: Alison, Dylan, Jaydan, Chernade and Demelza. Without them, I would not be able to run the portfolios that I lead on.

I have always seen the world in a more introspective and thoughtful way. I am a visual learner who is stubborn and never gives up, a contrarian by nature. Yet their patience and understanding is unwavering.

A wholehearted thank you also goes to the Chief Secretary, Financial Secretary, DCM, Chief Minister and my colleagues.

Madam Speaker, I am very aware that despite my opening statement on the negative side of public life, we also have to acknowledge that we can be a positive influence. It is important for me to be true to who I am. As my good friend would say, we are what we are.

As many may be aware, last February I recorded a podcast on 'Why Dyslexia', which was aired last week. Madam Speaker, I hope that having parliamentarians like me and the Hon. Joelle Ladislaus talking openly about our experiences and our unique strengths will be an inspiration to anyone who is struggling or doubting themselves. (*Banging on desks*)

Madam Speaker: The Hon. C A Saccarello.

Hon. C A Sacarello: Madam Speaker, in my first Budget speech, I would like to acknowledge how privileged I feel to be in this Chamber, participating in our democratic process. I would also like to thank you and the parliamentary team for the kind welcome and support I have received since last October.

Similarly, I would like to thank the public, to whom I am indebted for their generous votes on polling day. It is a debt I do not take lightly. Indeed, it is a responsibility I shall shoulder for the duration of my term in Opposition. To this end, I shall be unrelenting in my questioning and holding to account of those across the floor as I have been elected and employed to do so. I shall do this unashamedly but also professionally.

As Shadow Minister with special responsibility for civic and community engagements, I have spent the last eight months or so quizzing many in our community on exactly what their concerns are when it comes to how the Government spends taxpayers' money. Of course, the community has many other disquiets, but as this is a Budget session I will focus on their feedback regarding their money.

The responses I have received consistently, unambiguously and clearly have fallen into three categories. Firstly, is taxpayers' money being spent wisely? They are asking if we are getting good value for money. Is it being distributed fairly across the board? And is there transparency as to where and how it is being spent?

Secondly, are Government investments protecting Gibraltarians' long-term future? We are told the Government often borrows for capital expenditure. If Government is borrowing on behalf of our children, then it is imperative that every penny is invested in securing their future, whether it be for our children's affordable housing, our children's environment or our children's economic prospects.

Thirdly, are Gibraltar's assets being sold at the right time, for the right price and for the right reasons?

As these are the overriding concerns of our community, I shall use these criteria to attempt to guide me in the assessment of my shadow portfolios. But before analysing the business portfolio, I briefly would like to touch on the economy generally to view the context in which our businesses are operating.

Although the Government has outlined that our large GDP per capita has grown this year, it could sensibly be argued that this is not the most useful metric for a small economy, with a huge proportion of cross-border workers who are not included in the *per capita* figure but who nonetheless contribute to the gross domestic products.

So, in order to assess our economy's performance, perhaps more relevant metrics might be:

(1) Has the tax revenue increased year-on-year in real terms? The answer to this is no, and it is predicted to fall this year.

495 (2) Are we doubling down on debt and reducing the next generation's burden? The answer to this again is no, despite a small commitment to reduce debt by 10% of the Budget surplus, a minuscule amount by comparison.

(3) Has the value of assets owned by Government increased or decreased? We are never given sight of a balance sheet, but we can reasonably assume that the value of individual buildings or individual tracts of land have increased during the tenure of this Government because of the
500 increase in land and property values. Crucially, though, the number of buildings owned, the acreage of land owned and the number of assets generally has significantly diminished. A quick glance at the Budget Book illustrates the annual financial recurring burden to the taxpayer causes a direct effect of this Government's policy of renting office and even school space, as opposed to repurposing and refurbishing property we already own. Yet the Hon. Chief Minister claimed in his
505 Budget speech opening statement that our land is one of our key assets.

(4) Is the individual voter and other business owners feeling the pinch factor? The average person in Gibraltar is suffering from the effects of inflation, social insurance rises, fiscal drag by tax bands not being increased with inflation, unaffordable housing costs, rising energy prices, huge traffic fines at £300 a pop, and a Government which is out of touch with their everyday struggles.

510 The average business owner is absorbing exorbitant rents and increased costs; is faced with a stagnant market; and is paralysed by uncertainty. The pinch, I suggest, is certainly being felt.

On the topic of business, I would like to offer my congratulations to John-Paul Fa on his appointment as CEO to the newly merged Business and OFT Departments, and I wish him well, Madam Speaker, in his new challenge.

515 Joined-up thinking, inter-departmental co-ordination and a focused mission is what every business strives to perfect, so it makes sense for the Government's administrative support function itself to also share these aims. The business community awaits in eager anticipation for these synergies to be delivered.

520 Yesterday's announcement of the Strategic Plan for Business by Minister Arias-Vasquez was, on the surface, a welcome piece of news. Finally, the Department of Business has come up with a strategy.

At first glance, the strategy appears simple in its objectives. But to transform a glossy brochure and good intentions into successful achievement will not be easy. It will take a lot more than hard work to achieve, and I wish her and her Department good luck with the task ahead.

525 The Minister has now set a benchmark upon which the Government's relative success or failure can be measured; and we perhaps more importantly, the business community, will be monitoring progress closely.

530 Aside from uncertainty, another deterrent to economic growth is the lack of access to funding for developing businesses. There is a dearth of institutional funding available for short- and medium-term loans in Gibraltar, and personal or angel investors are hard to come by, particularly for smaller amounts which enable more modest business growth.

The Government has recently launched its Gibraltar Enterprise Scheme, which is supported by two local financial institutions. The jury remains out on its effectiveness as to the breadth and number of companies its net can support, given the initial low uptake. Further, this scheme is not
535 accessible to companies over three years old, and the loan amounts are capped at £25,000.

Madam Speaker, it is imperative that the Government urgently looks at all options to enable business to grow, including leaning on our financial institutions to provide business a better, faster and generally more supportive service. Put quite simply, access to finance and even to simple bank accounts is not fast enough nor good enough.

540 The GFSB has been busy implementing its new strategy, witnessing greater levels of activity and output, diversifying its offering and growing its membership. This strategic focus has led to a number of logistical changes in the operations. The Federation has increased membership

engagement, making it, as a result, a much better advocate for business. Chairman Owen Smith, in his recent annual dinner speech, highlighted as a major concern the uncertainty brought about by the stalling Brexit negotiations, which is resulting in a lack of investment for growth, calling it the single biggest issue for business.

The Chairman stated that businesses were finding it much harder to plan for an agreement than for a non-negotiated outcome. Their keynote speaker, FSB Northern Ireland Chairman, Roger Pollen, stated that their very active involvement in delivering the Northern Ireland Protocol saw them adopt an approach whereby no cohort, no sector was an acceptable casualty. If only local retailers, Madam Speaker, could enjoy the confidence of this mantra.

The GFSB's reaction to the recent Budget measures was one of concern. They stated it has simply increased the burden on business through the 20% relative increase in Corporate Tax, and through the above-inflation raise in social insurance. In requesting a more balanced budget where the burden is shared with other sectors, they echo the thoughts of the business community in calling for greater efficiency in Government services, incentives to stimulate investment, growth and job creation through tax relief and other measures.

The Chamber of Commerce, meanwhile, has recently produced an in-depth and well-researched tourism manifesto which provides a suggested strategy to unlock the potential opportunities that this particular sector or economy could and should be delivering. In this document, the Chamber pinpoints the importance of transport as key to its success, where connectivity and visitor management are clear and optimised.

The Chamber's response to this year's budgetary measures is also critical in nature. Similar to the GFSB, they claim that it places a further and unwanted burden on the private sector in the climate of higher interest rates. Their main areas of critique are that there are no material measures to assist business or attract investment, that the measures simply serve to add to the upwardly spiralling costs of doing business, that there are poor budgetary controls, and that all these punitive measures are seen to be plugging the hole created through continued Government inefficiencies. The Chamber highlights waste as a long-heralded problem and urges the Government to clamp down on unnecessary expenditure, describing some Departments' overspend as sizable and worrying, to say the least.

Madam Speaker, it is essential that the Government not only pays lip service to these business-sector bodies, which are a hub of business expertise, but that they act on the professional advice provided, and act swiftly.

In 2014, this Government introduced anti-bullying legislation via the Employment (Bullying at Work) Act, without any consultation with the trade bodies, and only with the union. When encouraged to apply a fair and equitable approach to both unions and trade bodies in similar future circumstances, the Chief Minister's response was a resounding no. His justification being that he was a socialist and would always side with the worker.

Whilst we completely support the need for anti-bullying measures, we also believe that a Government of all the people should not be dismissive of one side. We believe the Government should be batting for Team Gibraltar, Madam Speaker, representing both sides fairly and equitably. After all, one cannot survive without the other.

The value of small businesses cannot be underestimated. Small businesses are the lifeblood of our economy, as the Chamber attests. They contribute around 75% of Income Tax and virtually all Corporate Tax and import duty. It would be wise to remember that it is the Government's responsibility to act with surgical precision when increasing taxation on business, as the balance between raising extra tax revenue and pushing companies over the limits and to the wall is precariously set.

Conversely, if we help businesses thrive, we can create jobs whilst also advocating and legislating for the best possible working conditions for their employees, fostering greater levels of economic growth and prosperity.

On the topic of inward investment, there is ample anecdotal evidence to demonstrate a decline. The lack of a solid economic blueprint, coupled with the uncertainty brought about by

595 Brexit, of course, have caused a wobble in inward investment. Neither the Government, the
Opposition, nor the people of Gibraltar bear any portion of the blame for Brexit itself. That goes
without saying.

But a lack of clarity where our intended landing pad lies, the fact that the Chief Minister's
negotiations have been shrouded in a cloak of secrecy, and of course the lack of finality, have led
600 to a growing unease which continues to fester the longer the Government remains unable get the
deal across the line.

Their inability to close the deal, despite being 0.01% away, according to the Chief Minister's
election claim, has recently heightened uncertainty, which in turn has led to a partial paralysis of
the economy, Madam Speaker. Company directors and shareholders are fearful of blindly
605 investing in growth without the security of a return, and where we are faced with the reality that
new investors have been holding off for years now, waiting for the right moment to invest or, even
more worryingly, are perhaps investing elsewhere.

This is reflected in the 2.3% decrease in Corporate Tax revenues raised, despite a recent year-
on-year relative rise in Corporate Tax levels of 25%. And is further displayed by a steady decline in
610 new company formations in general, as shown by the register at Companies House. The years
between 2021 and 2024 show a steady decline, with a small post-COVID increase blip. The figures
do not lie, Madam Speaker.

The number of company incorporations between 2022 and 2024 have dropped an average of
28% under this Government, and there is no clearer reflection than this of the lack of confidence
615 across the economy in the poor platform for business presented by this Government. This growing
lack of confidence in our economy needs to be urgently addressed and reversed.

In applying my tests as to if money has been well spent, whether Government investments are
protecting our future, and whether Government assets are being wisely managed, I am afraid the
numbers often simply cannot be followed. For example, £26 million is contributed to the Gibraltar
620 Development Corporation, £11.8 million of which is transferred to the Economic Development
and Employment Ltd. The trail ends here.

It is one of the many Government-owned companies where taxpayers' money disappears into
an abyss. The sets of accounts published for Government-owned companies fall way short of
providing a clear picture into the movement and destination of funds.

625 The Chief Minister, defending the shortage of real data, offers us 'They are not Government',
by way of defence, yet these very companies are born of public funds. Where this money is spent,
how much is wasted and how fairly it is allocated is completely unknown as it is carefully and
purposefully hidden from public view in a jungle of companies. How can we, or any member of
the public, 'Follow the numbers', to quote the Chief Minister?

630 Moving on to fiscal stimulus. Investment in and encouragement of the construction sector has
long become a trademark of this Government's fiscal stimulus attempts. While a common and
useful economic tool, Government's current strategic approach to its investment in social and
affordable housing is flawed in a number of ways. First, fiscally, the injection of financial stimulus
into our economy is relatively short-lived. We have a small labour pool who are trained to work in
635 that sector.

The lack of concerted focus and investment in the trades at apprenticeship level results in the
bleeding of a large part of this stimulus as workers take their wages over the border.

Whilst we, on this side of the House, are strong advocates for affordable housing to both
purchase and rent, we do not believe the existing model properly provides for the housing needs
640 of the next generations. Practically, the investment of taxpayers' money to subsidise affordable
housing does not currently provide a long-term solution, as it is only affordable for a snapshot in
time. The reality is that on receipt of the keys, the newly acquired properties quickly shoot up in
value-to-market rates, rendering them instantly unaffordable to the average earner, thus
perpetuating the need for continued construction for each generation to come. Simply
645 impracticable as a sustainable solution.

With Government developments taking between five and 10 years to complete, we are running out of time, space and money. The Government is chasing its tail or, put another way, running the bath without the plug in. An alternative strategy needs to be found.

650 There are other ways to stimulate an economy and we need to have a multipronged approach moving forward rather than simply focusing on the few areas that have been cash cows in the past. There is a growing amount of unrest within the workforce of several of the areas I shadow, Madam Speaker.

655 The postal services recently suffered from an acute episode of ‘jobs for the boys’, a deeply rooted systemic failing of this Administration and one that appears to have little remedy, despite its severe side effects. Fortunately, union and worker involvement has temporarily staved off the parachuting-in of a couple of enchufes, in detriment to those other 14 workers who were equally – if not better – qualified and who had a much longer service history within the Department, but it may only be resolved temporarily. The other contenders await with trepidation.

660 The GEA has also very recently witnessed a ‘go slow’ by part of its workforce, who were not happy with their hazardous working conditions, poor equipment and a lack of investment in the maintenance and upgrade of their vehicle fleet, part of a long list of issues. It goes without saying that the safety of our workforce must be treated as a priority, but we must also highlight the requirement to invest in training to ensure that our electrical technicians are kept up to date with rapidly developing technologies and systems. The industrial action is symptomatic, Madam Speaker, of the Government failing to listen to the demands of the workforce and failing to invest in key areas of Infrastructure. **(Two Members: Hear, hear.)**

670 It is clear that there has been a breach of trust which must be addressed without delay and the solution, I suggest, must go well beyond platitudes. It is imperative that the public sector workforce is given the due care and support that they deserve. No more jobs for the boys; no more holding back on investment in training and equipment; and no more hidden agendas.

675 Madam Speaker, on the topic of investment in infrastructure, as I mentioned in May’s parliamentary session, a broad brushstroke calculation of new developments already in the pipeline will see the construction of approximately 6,000 new residential apartments over the next few years. That is a broad brushstroke.

This is the immediate future in infrastructural terms we are speaking about. These figures do not include smaller developments, nor commercial premises. So conservatively speaking, with an average of three persons per apartment, 18,000 people, an average of 150 litres of wastewater per day, our sewers would have to deal with an additional 2.7 million litres of wastewater per day.

680 The Government’s response to my Question on infrastructural investment was not one that inspired confidence. No figures were known nor cited on present capacity levels and chokepoints, never mind figures on future demands, but perhaps they will be revealed shortly.

685 Madam Speaker, it is crucial that Government fulfils its responsibilities and plans for and invests in the infrastructural upgrades required to future-proof our economic and population growth, even when the investment is not easily recognisable by the public. It need not be an obvious vote-winner to warrant pre-emptive action.

690 Whilst on the subject of AquaGib, I note that the Hon. Chief Minister confirmed to the House that the remaining 50% shares of AquaGib to be purchased from Northumbrian Water would be repurchased from Northumbrian Water soon, a deal that is hoped to be struck by the end of the summer. This side of the House — as many others — will remain vigilant as to how this will be funded, whether or not this offers good value for money to the taxpayer and whether the Government intends on retaining all, some or none of its shares as part of its strategy. Perhaps the Hon. Chief Minister in his response could offer a little clarity on how this is being funded.

695 Similar arguments around lack of value-for-money investments in our infrastructure can be extended to our power distribution, where network upgrades are patchy at best and we still suffer from regular interruptions to our power supply. We welcome the investment in the BESS battery system in principle, although we do not know the exact details of funding again. These batteries should address some of the supply issues we currently face, but we also strongly advocate for the

planning and delivery of a comprehensive upgrade of the distribution network, whose issues continue unchecked, to eradicate these problematic power cuts.

700 The residential and business sectors can all rightly expect a continuous, uninterrupted power supply in this day and age, especially when over £70 million of their money has been spent on a new power station.

Madam Speaker, the Chief Minister, I am sure, will wax lyrical on the virtues of their choice of investment over the GSD's — indeed, we already heard he had —but when the waxing wanes and the dust settles, the public will still be left with the bare-naked truth, that the power cuts have not gone away and remain as ever present as they were since 2011.

705 Equally, we strongly recommend a reduction in our environmental footprint through the wider and more comprehensive use of green technologies in power production. The GSLP Liberal Government has failed to meet previously established EU targets on clean energy production as a carbon reduction measure. Investment in the development of renewable energies would provide Gibraltar with greater security, as we would reduce our independence on the volatile prices of fossil fuels, especially within the context of increasing global destabilisation.

710 As yet, very little has been achieved in this area, with photovoltaic technology being the only solution currently on offer, providing a mere 2% of our energy requirements at its peak. With no strategy for diversification into alternative technologies on the table, a viable solution remains years away. This reflects, in my opinion, poor value for money from a taxpayer's perspective. While on the topic of the environmental impact of our utilities, the GSD advocates a need for much greater urgency to the start and completion of a sewage plant and a long-awaited cessation to the dumping of untreated effluence directly into our seas.

715 On the topic of e-Gov, reduction in administration is proven to incentivise business formation and indeed expansion. The Hon. Minister for Health, Care and Business recently gave a talk at the GFSB annual dinner, in which she described her own administration's e-Gov solution for business as 'clunky'. Three-quarters of a year into this current Administration and nearly 13 years since they began, there still appears to be no one-stop shop, no Government portal for businesses to register their company in one place and apply to all the relevant and separate Government entities, such as employment, business licensing, tax and other such requirements. The current Hon. Minister's predecessor claimed at the recent general election that their one-stop shop service was complete and operational, when clearly it was nothing more than a mirage.

720 I understand that work is in progress to develop a system which simplifies the application process, which we would encourage. We also advocate the development of a more comprehensive e-Gov solution which provides the user — the business, in this instance — with one point of contact where their query is subsequently sent to the relevant Department to respond accordingly. The system must be made to work in a way beyond initial administrative setup, but as a portal for continued business support and further development. This way businesses will be able to focus on their priorities, such as growth, while Government will optimise its revenues into Treasury.

730 Madam Speaker, we strongly urge the Government to turn its attention to the business community's needs and to ensure that the relevant Government Departments are also sufficiently supported and resourced to deliver this service. With escalating red tape costs, it is only a fair and equitable trade that the process is made easier. Efficiency is the order of the day.

740 In conclusion, there is evidence across all of my portfolios of inefficiencies, wastage and poor value for money. Glaringly obvious is a repeated lack of transparency as to how and where taxpayers' money has been spent. There is little evidence that investments have been sustainably made and public borrowing appears to be to the detriment of rather than in the interests of our children.

745 At this critical juncture in our history, investment in the economy means thinking out of the box and planning strategically for our future. It means embracing emerging technologies and industries, targeted investment in education and apprenticeships, robustly growing our tourism product, while offering support and clarity for existing businesses.

750 There is a real concern about our diminishing asset base. The community has watched year on year building after building and inch after inch of our land being sold off. After the selling of all of the family silver, I am being asked, 'What is left for the next generation?'

Over the centuries, Gibraltarians have always been quick to adapt to change and have been resilient in times of adversity. Now is the time to listen to our people and to do the right thing by them, so that they can prosper long into our future.

Thank you, Madam Speaker. (*Banging on desks*)

Madam Speaker: The Hon. P A Orfila.

760 **Minister for Housing and the University (Hon. P A Orfila):** Madam Speaker, in delivering my maiden speech as a Government Minister, firstly I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to everyone who voted for me and have given me the privilege and opportunity of leading the Housing Department as the Minister for Housing. My current responsibilities are housing and the University of Gibraltar, both very close to my heart.

765 Among the many goals I have set myself are the launching of the amended Housing Act and the revised Housing Allocations Scheme, which is now ready and brings the scheme into the 21st century. There is also the Rent-and-Repair Scheme, which I am sure will be very popular among those who do not want to keep waiting on the housing waiting list and do not mind entering into a Rent-and-Repair Scheme. This scheme will enable the buildings that have fallen
770 into disrepair to be brought back to life again. There are many of these buildings dotted all over Gibraltar and I want to offer them as a project for those who feel that they can embark on such a venture.

We need to understand that the buildings which will be offered are not for sale. They shall be repaired by interested parties, but they will always remain as part of our Government housing stock. Presently we are working with lawyers to produce an agreement that will be signed by the interested parties. The people who are eligible for this will be those who are on the Government housing waiting list and the composition of rooms will be applicable depending on circumstance.

775 There will be no payment of rent for a period of time, which will compensate the expense incurred. The scheme, Madam Speaker, will ensure that houses that have been left to die a slow and painful death will now be able to have life breathed into them again. This is an initiative that I am very excited about.

I now turn to the Housing Allocations Scheme, Madam Speaker. This was first amended by the GSLP in 1994 and now, after 30 years, it is time for it to be brought into sync with the changes and progress of the society in which we live today. The amendments will make the scheme fairer and will flag up those who need it the most. It will also provide a clearer picture of the applicant's position and their needs. The scheme will now better reflect the applicant's position within the Housing Waiting List.

785 The Housing Allocation Committee, under the new scheme, will continue to recommend to the Department those that require to be allocated a flat due to their pressing medical conditions. The Housing Allocation Committee will now also be able to give points to other cases that are not immediate, thus giving them a better chance of being allocated a flat under the normal waiting list due to their points. Their position will be accelerated because the new pointing system will now increase their chances.

795 Presently, persons considered medical B or C have had little or no chance of getting an allocation on medical grounds. This amended scheme will now show us clearly who needs the allocation on medical grounds.

A Mental Welfare Officer has also been invited to form part of the board. We feel that this is a step in the right direction and a crucial addition to the committee. Mental health affects most of us, if not all of us, at some point in our lives and we cannot overlook this.

800 Madam Speaker, the Housing Department is fully committed to working with other Departments, Agencies and Authorities with a view to providing a seamless approach and

response to individuals with multiple and complex needs. The Department is keen to foster a holistic approach as part of its practice.

805 With regard to the allocation of flats, in the eight months since I have taken the role of Housing Minister, we have given 132 houses. However, we have received 192 new applications, which when added to the backlog of applications which this Department had – and which has now thankfully been cleared – brings the total up to 219 new applicants on the waiting list.

810 There are new ideas in the pipeline for the purpose of accelerating the handing over of houses, however. One successful initiative is the handing over of the property ‘as is’. Some tenants are more than happy to do the repairs themselves. Tenants and applicants are welcoming this initiative. Keys are collected and they renovate the flat, speeding up the handing-over process. Where necessary, we will help by providing basics, like a toilet seat or a sink or bath, if needed.

815 We are also very pleased to announce that Hassan Centenary Terraces, Phase 1, to date has given us back 27 Government rental houses and we are expecting another 37 Government flats coming back with Phase 2, giving us a total of 69 Government houses coming back into our rental stock.

I would like to add that 368 applicants of those who have purchased in Hassans were on our lists marked as suspended. Had we not invested in construction for home ownership, our waiting list today could have increased by 368 more.

820 Madam Speaker, since December 2023 the hotline has received 32 calls and we have been able to retrieve 10 flats. Other flats which have been alerted to us are going through legal procedures. At this point I would like to thank the people who call the hotline, making this possible, and I would like to encourage everyone who has any information about empty or vacant flats to call our hotline number on 20040040.

825 Madam Speaker, with housing, meeting with people, advising them or listening to them is a very important role of this Department. However, there is a very large number of people who want to see the Minister for Housing. Since October I have already seen over 270 people in my personal clinics. This is an ongoing weekly exercise. We cannot always solve the problem, but we can advise them. The Housing Manager has seen 69 people. We have conducted 31 social interviews and the Housing Allocation Committee has dealt with 85 cases.

830 Madam Speaker, I have also met with almost all tenants’ associations now from our housing estates and continue to interact with them as often as necessary. We are in constant communication with them to help address any issues that may arise. This allows us to handle matters in a faster and more efficient way, ensuring the better upkeep of our housing estates.

835 The close links that these associations have established with us has also allowed for a positive link with the Housing and Works Department. This in turn has been very positive and productive so that works can be dispatched as soon as possible.

840 We are also aware, Madam Speaker, of the antisocial behaviour in certain areas of our housing estates, usually caused by the same few tenants. We are working tirelessly with the Police and Security Services to address this and we shall persevere until it stops. To date we have received 90 emails of antisocial behaviour, which have been dealt with accordingly. And we are also pleased to announce that CCTV cameras are going to be installed in some estates, which will give tenants a sense of comfort.

Looking ahead, this is something which we would like to do in all estates eventually.

845 Recently, Madam Speaker, the Housing Department has launched through the e-Gov portal an innovative process which allows an individual to register in a Government rental property for the sole purpose of renewal of documentation without eligibility to tenancy or residency. This new process is fully integrated with the e-Services portal. This, Madam Speaker, will help individuals who need to renew important documentation such as medical cards and ID etc., always of course with consent of the tenant, thus ensuring that genuine cases are dealt with promptly.

850 At this point I would like to thank the various stakeholders – e-Services, LPS, CSRO, The Hub and No. 6 Convent Place – for working together with the Housing Department in order to achieve this most important step in the right direction for so many who need it.

855 The Ministry for Digital and Financial Services and the Housing Department have also launched six new online forms for various services. They include: (1) Application for Government accommodation; (2) Application for re-accommodation; (3) Application for government pensioner exchange; (4) Application to exclude persons on tenancy; (5) Application to include persons on tenancy; and (6) Online payment of rent.

860 These services are amongst the most used by our citizens and because they are now fully integrated into the Housing Department back office system, it makes the application process more streamlined and easier to manage. These services, Madam Speaker, can be accessed via the e-Gov portal.

865 Madam Speaker, true to my manifesto commitment, I have improved the daily dealings of the public with the Department. Not only are counters now open every day of the week from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m., but tenants will now also be able to come in any day of the week from Monday to Friday to pay their rent. We have increased this from one general counter and one rent counter to two general counters and one rent payment counter. The latter can be accessed every day, unlike before when the rent counter only opened two days during the week.

870 We have made coming into our offices much more user friendly by building three new enclosed cubicle counters, all of which have been soundproofed, cater for disability and which allow people to sit in the comfort of a private cubicle and interact with the member of the Department without being overheard by anyone else.

875 Madam Speaker, tenants can also access the Housing and Works Reporting Office now on the 9th floor of the ICC building. The Housing and Works Reporting Office was on the 10th floor. This allows Works issues/complaints to be addressed directly to someone from Housing and Works and not just a voice at the end of a phone line.

Housing and Works will be there every day from 9 a.m. to 12 midday. They can still, however, be accessed via phone if tenants want to call instead of coming in.

880 These refurbishment works have vastly improved services and Government would like to thank both the public and our staff for their patience and support during this hectic interim period. We will keep working hard to ensure that communication with the Housing Department will not be an onerous task. We also have an email address should they want to reach us without coming into the office. That is MHGU@gibraltar.gov.gi.

885 Madam Speaker, the Housing Department has signed a data-sharing agreement with the Department of Social Security, as well as other Departments, Agencies and authorities to ensure proper cross-communication with the said entities. This allows for more streamlined processes and procedures as well as assisting prospective applicants and tenants with applications.

890 Information relevant to certain benefits applicable to processing and eligibility of rent relief will be received by the Housing Department directly from the DSS. Housing will then be able to assist the tenant in a more automated manner, and in turn allow for the reduction of housing rent arrears.

895 Madam Speaker, we have also introduced direct debit. Letters have already gone out to all our tenants, should they want to take advantage of this. The Housing Department has been working with both the banks and the Treasury Department to set this up. This system will not only allow for another secure method of payment, but also streamline and facilitate services for our tenants as well as for all Departments.

900 Tenants will only be required to set up the direct debit once and not have to amend their instruction to the bank every time there is a yearly rent increase or changes in tenancy or parking etc. This new process will also reduce the long queues experienced at our counters. More tenants are paying online and invoices via emails are on the increase, therefore reducing paper waste.

Amounts collected in rent for the year 2022-23 was £5,030,405.77; and in 2023-24 it was £5,152,285.55. The Housing Department has therefore collected £121,879.78 more rent in 2023-24 than in 2022-23, and therefore there has also been an increase in payments. We have had 678 more payments than in 2023.

905 Madam Speaker, this Department is also working diligently in the recovery of rent arrears and we are working to find ways in which we can facilitate payment for those who must pay their rent arrears. We are committed to our people and the taxpayer has every right to ask certain people to pay their rent, like most of us do. (**Members:** Hear, hear.)

910 At this point I must praise the best part of our tenants, who do pay their rent religiously every month, and they make up for about 90% of our housing tenants, but I want to assure them that we shall continue to tackle those who are in arrears. Genuine cases will be helped, but we shall take legal action against those who are blatantly ignoring their obligation to pay rent.

915 Madam Speaker, the way certain houses are handed back to the Housing Department is totally unacceptable. We need to look after taxpayers' money and make people accountable and make them responsible. We are working to introduce a system in due course that when tenants terminate or exchange a tenancy agreement, the tenants will have to commit to certain conditions of return.

920 Madam Speaker, the state that some Government houses are returned to us is deplorable and in some cases contravenes health and safety standards and we cannot and will not tolerate this. It also means that houses take much longer to be refurbished to acceptable standards for the next tenant. Tenants are duty bound to look after their Government homes. Hopefully this system will save money and accelerate the waiting timeframe.

925 Madam Speaker, I now turn to the wonderful work which is done by our Housing and Works Agency: 98 flats to date have been completely refurbished during 2023-24; there has been in excess of 100 works orders for the occupational therapy; they have responded to 2,074 after-hours emergency work callouts and 1,419 callouts during working hours; there have been over 6,000 general work orders pertaining to maintenance and ongoing works in our properties. We must not forget that we have 5,000 properties on our books and we maintain these properties on the inside as well as on the outside.

930 Presently we are refurbishing Knights Court, St. John's Court, Tankerville House, Macmillan House and Varyl Begg Phase 1. External refurbishments to Varyl Begg Phase 2, 3 and 4, Arengos, Willis House and Coelho House are still to be done.

935 Madam Speaker, our estates matter and we want to ensure that they will be kept in good condition. And at this point, I would also like to remind the tenants who live in our estates that they too play an important role in the upkeep of their estates.

The Housing Act will also be ready very soon. I set up a working group with all stakeholders, including landlords' associations and Action for Housing, so that I could personally hear their views and take them on board. We have been meeting in order to make the necessary amendments required.

940 The Housing Act was last amended in 2007 and has been an ongoing thing with successive Governments, but it is now very close to being presented. The key is finding the correct balance, one which is in keeping with today's changing society and addressing everyone's needs in order to achieve a fairer outcome.

945 In my closing statement I must relay the immense pride that I feel in looking back to what my party has achieved. Clearly we shall be told that housing continues to be a tale of doom and gloom, but it is not a tale of doom and gloom, as the hon. Members opposite would like us to believe. Of course for some we will have doom and gloom, but we are working very hard to try and bring sunshine into their lives and get the solutions very soon.

950 This Government has built and continues to build more houses for its people than any other Government has ever done in the history of this Parliament. Whereas in most places in the world young people only dream about becoming homeowners, our young people are becoming homeowners.

955 It is true that COVID delayed construction, but not just here in Gibraltar, it put the whole world on hold. The truth is that this Government delivers on the housing front. The determined efforts of this Government to provide our community with excellent affordable homes cannot be

dismissed. The successful construction of Hassan Centenary Terraces has resulted in a magnificent skyline that demonstrates this Government's commitment to housing.

960 Every time one enters or exits Kingsway Tunnel, which incidentally was also completed and built by this Government, you will be in awe of the magnificent buildings which stand as a striking symbol and reminder of the GSLP continued accomplishments in providing exceptional affordable housing for our people of Gibraltar. (**Several Members:** Hear, hear.) This, Madam Speaker, whether our hon. Members across the floor like it or not, will always and forever be for them a sore reminder of the GSLP's legacy and track record when it comes to housing.

And that, Madam Speaker, is a fact.

965 I would like to end by thanking all the voluntary organisations that we work with. They provide an invaluable service to our Department and our community. I would like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to my Department, to my ministerial staff and to the Housing and Works Agency, and all those who work behind the scenes, for their complete dedication to duty and service.

970 To each one of them, and they know who they are, a huge thank you. Without you all, my job would be impossible. For your sterling application and commitment, I will be forever grateful.

I would also like to thank you, Madam Speaker, and your very hardworking team for all their invaluable work and for making parliamentary sessions so much more bearable. Thank you for the coffee and biscuits. (*Laughter*)

975 Lastly, once again, my eternal gratitude must go to the people of Gibraltar who voted for me and have given me this opportunity. Thank you. (*Banging on desks*)

Madam Speaker, I now turn to the university portfolio. (*Laughter*) Just when you thought it was over. This is indeed very close to my heart. Education is the profession of my choice. Teaching in our schools is where I spent my time teaching most of you here. (*Laughter*) This is an area which I am passionate about and which I know back to front.

980 A university was very much needed in Gibraltar for local students who might not have wanted to or could not go away to further their education in the UK. Thanks to this Government this is now possible. We really did need the University.

985 Despite its relatively young age, Madam Speaker, the University of Gibraltar continues to establish itself internally, regionally and locally as an institution of teaching, learning and research excellence. Next year will mark the University's 10th anniversary. How time has flown.

990 As of 31st March 2024, the university had enrolled 593 students for the academic year ending 31st July 2024, across a diverse range of academic programmes, professional and including educational courses, language courses and technical training courses. The number of academic programmes offered by the university has continued to expand, with undergraduate degrees now offered in maritime science, computing and entrepreneurship, nursing and business, all supported by a range of access courses and post-graduate degrees offered in management and leadership, research (PhD), education, business, gaming, maritime science, environmental science and healthcare.

995 New programmes offered this past year included: a part-time Master's in Education degree for local educators; an MSc in Environmental Science and Climate Change; an MSc Contemporary Healthcare degree; an MBA in Gaming; a Level 4 Teaching Certificate.

1000 Since launching its first academic taught programmes – BBA and MSc in Maritime Science – in September 2018 with a combined total of 30 students, the number of students undertaking academic programmes at the university has continued to grow year on year, with 280 students enrolled in the current academic year. It is also pleasing to see that almost 60% of all academic students are local, and the remaining 40% being international students from across the globe and representing 53 different nationalities.

1005 Madam Speaker, following extensive consultation with industry and completion of a rigorous UK validation process, the next academic year will see a further three new degrees offered by the university: MSc Sustainable Maritime Operations, a BSc (Hons) in Mental Health Nursing, and an MSc in Advanced Health Practice.

1010 The close collaboration of the university with the GHA in terms of workforce planning needs and the resulting increase in the number of students being educated in healthcare at the university, has meant that the current on-campus nursing simulation suite has become too small to provide the necessary practice for clinical skills students needed.

1015 However, recognising the essential service that the university is providing to the Gibraltar community with these programmes, the university was recently able to attract funding from the private sector, Kusuma Trust – and we are *very* grateful for this – for the complete refurbishment of the top floor of its North Wing, the old St Christopher’s building, to establish a state of the art simulator for training of health practitioners, complete with a six-bedded ward, a High Dependency Unit and a Rehabilitation Unit, together with classrooms. This in turn has addressed one of the GSLP Liberal Manifesto 2023 commitments.

1020 The CERG, Centre of Excellence in Responsible Gaming, has continued to grow in its reputation both locally and globally. This past year CERG provided numerous public lectures, in collaboration with Yale University, to the gaming industry and delivered 40 presentations at international conferences. They are doing well.

1025 In addition to its academic programmes, of course, the university has provided, through its Professional Development Department, a range of professional development, continuing education and CPD-accredited short courses, all aimed at addressing local needs and covering topics that include Gibraltar law, accounting, insurance, introduction to management, management communication in action, and creative thinking and problem solving.

1030 The university has also acted as an exam centre for the professional awards such as AAT, the Association of Accounting Technicians; and ACCA, Association of Chartered Certified Accountants. In March 2024, the university was awarded the AAT Small Training Provider of the Year as part of the United Kingdom category for the quality of the tutor delivery, its excellent virtual learning environment, exemplary student support and high pass rates.

1035 This year also saw the Department running its second Professional Diploma of Competence in Gibraltar Financial Services. This course is the sole qualification endorsed by the GFSC and is a cross-sector qualification developed in direct consultation with the local regulator and industries.

1040 Madam Speaker, the University Language Centre has had another busy year providing in-house English classes to 136 local students in various businesses in Gibraltar. In addition, the centre has provided intensive English courses to two groups of Japanese students from Chiba University and one group of Polish students.

1045 In terms of technical training, the University Maritime Academy has continued to grow in its reputation both locally and globally. During the last academic year, the academy’s beyond compliance fire-fighting course has been provided to an increasing number of local and international shipping operators: including Carnival UK, P&O, Cunard, Marella and Windstar, the majority of whom are attracted by the convenience of being able to dock in Gibraltar, have their crew transported by the university and typically within less than 20 minutes have their crew undertaking an Maritime Coastguard Agency approved training course at the university’s state-of-the-art training facilities, all whilst their passengers are enjoying exploring and spending money in Gibraltar.

1050 The success of this approach to training ship crew has been such that several large international cruise operators have indicated that they will be making additional calls to Gibraltar.

1055 Further, as a reflection of the growing reputation of the academy, the university were able to attract funding from the private sector, Balaena/Gibdock, for the establishment of a new state-of-the-art fire simulator for training. This in turn has addressed another of the GSLP Liberal Manifesto 2023 commitments. For this we are very grateful to Balaena.

1055 Despite extremely challenging targets, an increasingly competitive international market and the constraints posed by the processing delays of visas for international students, recruitment of students continues to be successful, with tuition fee incoming and increasing from £1,746,657 in the university year ending 31st July 2022, to £2,151,421 in the year ending July 2023.

Moreover, tuition income is expected to exceed £2.5 million by 31st July 2024. This growth reflects the university's ability to recruit increasing numbers of local, regional and international students attracted by the university's quality student experience.

In expanding, Madam Speaker, the Gibraltar University has not only attracted its local and regional reach but also its global reach. Key locations for all programmes include Morocco, the UK, the US, British Overseas Territories, Canada and Europe.

Under the GSLP Liberal Manifesto 2023, it was stated that in recognition of the benefits to the Gibraltar economy of increasing the number of international students, His Majesty's Government would assist the university in its efforts to attract a wider net of international students to increase the current £5.7 million a year benefit of international students on the Gibraltar economy to approximately £12 million per year.

It was pleasing to note, therefore, that the contribution to the Gibraltarian economy from the international students alone for the year ending 31st July 2023 was £6 million and that this past academic year, as of 31st March 2024, this figure had increased to £8.3 million net. Well done, university. *(Banging on desks)*

Madam Speaker, it is also pleasing to note that the Europa Suites accommodation has seen significant occupancy, with the majority of rooms now filled by university fee-paying students.

Conclusion, Madam Speaker, and I have not coughed. *(Laughter)* The University of Gibraltar continues to achieve remarkable progress across all areas. Its academic offerings, research initiatives, professional and technical training programmes, and financial performance are robust and impactful. I extend my thanks to all our stakeholders for their unwavering support and commitment. Together, we are building a brighter future for the University of Gibraltar and our community.

I will take this opportunity to thank Vice-Chancellor Catherine Bachleda and her hardworking staff for their continuous support to education and I must congratulate them on their continued success.

Thank you very much. *(Banging on desks)*

Madam Speaker: The Hon. E J Reyes.

Hon. E J Reyes: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I wish to note for the record, as others have done, that this happens to be my 17th address to this House. I have done so from both sides of the House. Similar to what some of my colleagues said before, I think it is only correct that we mention some previous Members of Parliament.

I am grateful to two past colleagues who, for personal reasons, chose not to stand for election this last time around. That is my friends Daniel Feetham and Elliott Phillips. I miss them and it is on occasions like these where you have your ideas when you first look at the Appropriation Bill and you bounce things off them, just to double check on yourself that you are not going haywire. So, I miss them.

And, in all honesty, I even miss a couple of colleagues that used to sit on the other side of the House. I welcome the new Members. I was not a pupil of the Hon. Pat Orfila. I was actually her colleague. We shared many a laugh. I see she is even laughing at it now. We shared many laughs. We used to congregate at break times in Bayside School and in particular staff from there. Sadly, some of our colleagues who used to share those moments with us are no longer here, so we pay tribute to them. *(Interjection)* Those memories will always stay in our mind.

In particular, two colleagues who I met, I shared many moments outside of this House, Steven Linares and Samantha Sacramento. We ended up travelling together, representing Gibraltar together. That was our mission in the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association.

Some people sometimes wonder the value behind attending CPA conferences. Well, I have attended many conferences. I have led some delegations. I have been a member of delegations under the leadership of either Steven or Samantha. But certainly the message of unity as far as Gibraltar is concerned has always been there.

1110 In this day and age of social media, livestreaming, broadcasting and so on, you would be surprised how far around the globe the messages coming out from this Parliament will reach. Those who attempted to come to a conclusion that there is total disharmony across the floor of this House, because we cannot completely concur on the state of our nation today, on the actual state of our finances, of how best to raise revenue, on how best to spend it on what projects, that is democracy. Everyone is entitled to their views and we do have this mutual democratic respect.

1115 But because I believe that the message does go to all the four corners of the world, across the seven seas, there is one message that is unanimous across the floor of this House: we are here to serve and protect the people of Gibraltar. *(Banging on desks)*

1120 Above all, on a day like today where I wish well to those seeking election to Westminster, I send a message to them, alongside those in La Moncloa where they spend their time. I send a message to the mayors, some more amicable than others, of the surrounding areas.

Gibraltar is totally undivided. Gibraltar will stick together. Gibraltar will not give in in respect of sovereignty, jurisdiction and control, no matter what they want to do. *(Banging on desks)*

1125 If they have not heard it, I will say the answer mathematically to the power of three: sovereignty, jurisdiction and control. No, no and no. *(Banging on desks) (Interjections and laughter)* One of you come over, we will do it.

1130 Madam Speaker, so why break tradition, I have always started talking about sports-related matters and let's start on a good note. I am glad to note that the Government continues with what for what years has been a long-existing policy, and that is to assist all our local sporting bodies to overcome any foreign Government's politically-inspired attempts to block our membership of international sporting bodies.

1135 I note and I hope that, slowly but surely, international sports governing bodies will judge Gibraltar's membership applications on their own merit and that these international bodies will not shamefully allow themselves to be coerced by our neighbour's unjustified and unscrupulous arguments.

1140 Therefore, Gibraltar's longstanding and cross-party policy of assisting sporting associations will certainly continue to receive the Opposition's wholehearted and unwavering support. We sincerely wish all our local sporting associations the very best in their continuing battles to obtain their respective international memberships, where these are still pending. It is unwavering: they are rightfully and legitimately theirs.

Madam Speaker, the Opposition have made it clear that we do not consider that savers' or taxpayers' monies should be used to fund the development or construction of a new football stadium. However, subject to that, we wish the Gibraltar Football Association all the very best in their ongoing construction and upgrading of the national stadium.

1145 Victoria Stadium is, indeed, an ideal site for local sports lovers to attend and patriotically support our teams. I am sure this House remains unanimous in wishing our teams participating within European competitions all the best in their forthcoming games.

1150 The forthcoming developments at Victoria Stadium should result in an improvement to football facilities in Gibraltar. However, there is still a great need for further training facilities if our future generations are to aspire in improving their overall skills and standards. It continues to break my heart to see so many Gibraltar-registered football teams having to go over into Spain in order to train in preparation for local and international matches.

Indeed, more facilities are very much needed if we are to continue to aspire progressing beyond the qualification stages in respect of international competitions.

1155 The GSD continues to believe that, alongside the refurbished facilities which will be enjoyed by our football fraternity, there is still a greater need for extensive training facilities in order to cater for our ever-increasing number of participants in football and other sports.

1160 Unfortunately, there is still not a clear and accurate picture in respect of the GFA development of Victoria Stadium. We know that the lease has been granted to the Football Association at a price that does not reflect any commercial or residential use. It transpires that the project will not only see the construction of an UEFA approved football facility but also a project which will see

commercial and residential facilities built. The selling price for the lease is certainly not the best amount Government could have obtained as businesses with commercial and residential interests would almost certainly have offered a higher premium.

1165 The Victoria Stadium project itself has caused great debate and division not only among the football fraternity but also amongst our general public. The big questions remain.

Madam Speaker, what exactly is it that this project is trying to achieve? Will the project result in an improvement of sporting facilities for everyday use by players of all abilities? Will our youngsters benefit from improved training facilities?

1170 These facilities should ensure that the introduction and development of our youngsters into the world of sports, very often arising from our schools' sports curriculum and sporting clubs' commitments, are equally catered for. It is our collective duty to make facilities available for our public at large who wish to participate in healthy sporting activities.

Madam Speaker, I ask: is everyone clear about the funding of the Victoria Stadium project? Originally, it had been said that it would be largely funded with the help from grants issued to the GFA by UEFA. Then we had the version that the Father of this House once said: it would be funded as an investment either from Government-owned companies or maybe it was from the Savings Bank. Then this was changed, pre-election, into investments from private entities where no taxpayers' monies would be used.

1180 After the election, it has become clear that monies had been advanced by Government for the Victoria Stadium project. Firstly, we were told in this House £965,930, which we believe has been repaid, but then there follows a further loan of £524,000.

Beyond the Games themselves, the facilities were meant to enable Gibraltar sports participants to continue to achieve as best results as possible and aim for higher standards, thanks to an increase of facilities which develops their wide-ranging sporting talents.

1185 We have heard in this House of a range of excuses as to why the newly-constructed facilities at Europa Sports Complex are still not properly maintained. Our local sporting fraternity confide in me their personal opinion that there is a certain element of managerial inefficiency contributing to the now five-years delay in what was once upon a time hailed as a showcase of facilities.

1190 It is totally unacceptable that it has taken five years to agree upon a structure for the running and upkeep of sporting facilities at Europa. Different Ministers have offered different answers in this House. One Minister informed this House that a management running contract had been awarded to a newly set up entity with representatives from three well-established and stakeholder sports associations. Plus, additionally, there were nominations made directly by the Minister himself.

1195 The latest version is that we have moved into an agreement whereby the Europa facilities will be run and maintained by the Gibraltar Football Association, and apparently this will be exclusively by them. The stakeholders who were parties to the original agreement say that they were and still have not been consulted or made properly aware of matters in respect of what are now the latest arrangements.

1200 I look forward to the answer and explanations of why this managerial facility has resulted in the final version we have now.

Madam Speaker, I note that no sooner had the Rugby 7s competition finished this weekend that the GFA started to change locks at the Europa facilities. Therefore, I now ask: what are the costs of running these facilities?

1205 In our Book, Head 52, sub-head 2(7), makes provision for half a million, £500,000, under the title 'Europa Point Sports Complex'. I ask: is this a payment to be made to the GFA for running the Europa Sports Complex? Madam Speaker, what about the income to be derived from use of the Europa Sports Complex?

1210 We know there are companies using premises within the complex for private, commercial, catering and hospitality purposes. If payments are being made for use of these facilities, where is this reflected in the estimates or is that now to become an income which the GFA keeps for themselves and not reflected in any shape or form through Government accounting procedures?

1215 I ask: what staff will be employed to run the day-to-day affairs of the Europa Sports Complex?
And who will be their employer?

Furthermore, in the Improvement and Development Fund section there shows a £330,000 forecast outturn under sub-head 4, entitled 'Island Games Facilities'. Seeing that the Island Games were held in 2019 – that is five years ago – what exactly was this expense incurred?

1220 There is now zero provision for 2024-25 in this same sub-head. So is it that the works are now deemed fully completed, despite my continued reminders of failures such as the outstanding ball-stop nets at Europa Sports Ground or the provision of adequate scoreboards to keep spectators and players alike – we need to be updated as to the progress of the games being played.

1225 The Minister for Sports and I shared some time together on Saturday up at Europa and none of us were any the wiser on what the score line was, so it would certainly help middle- and old-aged men like us to keep up to date on what is happening.

1230 Madam Speaker, we have quite often obtained results in numerous sporting disciplines which make our neighbours and sporting opponents in official competitions envious of our rather good and consistent performances. I sincerely hope that the present sports facilities, when eventually fully completed and when eventually properly maintained, will meet local requirements not only for today's needs but for at least a generation to come.

1235 The latest occurrences in respect of the Europa sports facilities are that despite the GFA having secured a lease at a bargain price to enhance facilities at the Victoria Stadium, forthcoming European football competitions will have to be played at Europa. This in turn now presents a problem for other sports associations like rugby and cricket, who will see their respective allocation times enjoyed up until recently will now be greatly reduced.

I offer an example: the problems to be faced by the Gibraltar Cricket Association, who are currently in preparation for the World Cup qualifiers to be played in Germany during this month of July. Gibraltar enjoys ICC membership and are, therefore, required to maintain a minimum number of leagues as well as youth and female cricket incentives.

1240 Gibraltar's men and women international teams are successfully climbing in international rankings and this is something we should be extremely proud about, given the size of our population. In my example, success in cricket not only equals but I dare say also outweighs that seen in other sports. So, therefore, Madam Speaker, I hope that cricket does not suffer the consequences which some fear could come about due to the lack of facilities and allocations.

1245 Or, worse still, that their membership of the ICC be called into question due to not being able to meet the minimum requirements as set by the international governing body.

I hope I speak for the whole House as we offer our collective best wishes to all forthcoming participants who, through their committed efforts, will hopefully yet again make Gibraltar proud of our sporting achievements in the forthcoming season which is about to commence.

1250 It is very gratifying to see that the summer sports programme continues to be a very popular facility which is enjoyed by so many youngsters during the schools' summer holidays. This original GSD programme had small beginnings and then expanded into equally successful provisions such as the introduction of what is known as Stay and Play, which caters for potential participants who, for a variety of reasons, cannot fully enjoy the mainstream programmes on offer.

1255 In this respect, I offer the Minister my full support because I believe the time has now come for a further review and expansion of programmes being offered, and we should seriously consider the introduction of bespoke activities for those youngsters who have special needs which neither fit into the mainstream or the Stay and Play facilities. If we jointly conduct a review or audit of what is currently available using the premise of sports for all, it could well be that other programmes need to be introduced for the future.

1260 Madam Speaker, I cannot end talking about sport without paying tribute to the late Elliot – or better known Tony – Macedo, a Gibraltarian who played for Fulham, and even to this day there are still many here who support Fulham Football Club due to Tony's magnificent performance. I hope we see others taking over from him. *(Banging on desks)*

1265 I continue by saying that I wish to reaffirm my personal, as well as the GSD's communal, convictions that through the collective celebration of social events, participating Gibraltarians contribute towards reinforcing our identity, our culture and our history as a people and as a community.

1270 Both the performing and fine arts fraternities have always proved themselves to be very proactive within their own specialised areas, and I take this opportunity to congratulate all the groups and individuals who have done Gibraltar extremely proud through their international participations. It is always a personal and collective pleasure to be able to say how proud we are of the achievements of our fellow Gibraltarians.

1275 This year's estimates show yet again a token provision of £1,000 under the Improvement and Development Fund expenditure set aside under Head 102, Other Projects, sub-head 4K or kilo, entitled 'Theatre'. It is public knowledge that the National Theatre aims to provide an enlarged theatre created within the John Mackintosh Hall complex.

1280 This theatre will be built with funds provided for by public subscriptions. The new theatre will replace the existing John Mackintosh Hall facilities, which currently has just over 200 seating capacity and which is always in great demand for use by local schools, local dance groups and so on for their productions. It still remains with a big question: where will traditional users of the existing hall be able to stage their shows?

1285 With the refurbishment of John Mackintosh Hall facilities, we are not providing much-needed additional facilities. It boils down to an exchange of a small facility for a much larger one which will not necessarily cater for ever-increasing demands of theatre facilities.

The new larger theatre might be good news for some, but it has also resulted in sad news for others, like local educational schools and dance groups for whom the existing size was just right. I wish the traditional users of the hereto existing Mackintosh Hall facilities the best of luck in finding alternative venues which caters for their specific needs whilst works are being undertaken.

1290 I have been unable to obtain answers through Questions in this House as to the progress of the National Theatre project because the official answer was that it is a private project run by trustees. To the ordinary citizen this answer does not really offer any clarity as to what the future holds. Are funding needs being met? That is a question still asked by many and we deserve an update in this respect.

1295 Madam Speaker, moving now on to educational matters, I wish to start by citing once again, like last year, from a passage I have used. It says:

Children must be able to play, study and grow in a peaceful environment. Woe to anyone who stifles their joyful impulse to hope!

1300 With this in mind, I cannot stress enough the need to ensure we get it absolutely right when planning and building facilities which will serve our children's educational purposes in preparation for adult life. Much has been said in respect of Government's recently completed projects for the re-provision and expansion of our schools.

1305 For our pupils' benefit I sincerely hope that decisions to be taken in respect of future projects, like the Gibraltar College of Further Education, will be based above all upon feedback received from the professionals in the field, namely from teachers themselves. The Gibraltar Teachers' Association feel, unfortunately, that on occasions they are ignored or not consulted on a number of educational reforms that the Department of Education have or are about to embark upon.

As both a past teacher and even past President of the Gibraltar Teachers' Association/NASUWT, I am still someone who has educational matters extremely close to his heart. I repeat my recommendation to the Minister for Education to listen and continue to work as closely as possible with classroom teachers, albeit alongside his senior management teams.

1310 Classroom teachers want to be a part of any process that strives to improve our educational system and they want to be actively involved in meaningful consultation, especially before final

decisions are taken. Surely the way forward, based upon ideas proposed or suggested by these professionals, can only but contribute to the well-being and best possible future for our children.

This, Madam Speaker, is something which I hope we can all agree is paramount.

1315 I would like to take this opportunity to also recommend to the Minister that in the plans for resourcing of our schools careful consideration is given to current trends in respect of developments in schools' curriculums. We have seen the delivery of additional BTEC vocational courses being made available, but some of these classes are being delivered in premises outside of our secondary schools and by staff not directly employed as qualified teachers by the Department of Education.

1320 I beg to ask: why is this necessary? Was it not foreseen in the planning of our two secondary schools that in order to expand upon availability of subjects specialist rooms would be required? I know we have qualified teachers employed by the Department of Education who are able and willing to deliver these courses, so why have we contracted out these services?

1325 Those teachers who wish to offer more courses have personally met with the Director of Education to make clear their availability and their desire to offer BTEC vocational courses. But, unfortunately, their offer to date has not been taken up for some unknown reason.

1330 The GSD have raised the concept of modern apprenticeships in the past and we still believe we need to offer more in this field than we currently provide. Those pupils who do not wish to pursue an academic future need to be provided with the opportunity of a modern apprenticeship programme which, if properly structured, has the same standing as higher education. We need to create a gold standard for an apprenticeship programme so that employers have confidence in the system.

1335 The time for investment is now, Madam Speaker, not just in formal academic education heading towards entry into higher education, but also in the co-ordination of training and skills through vocational courses that carry international accreditation. May I recommend to Government that in their planning for a new College of Further Education special attention is given to the teaching and development of technical and digital skills?

1340 We must not forget the ultimate aim of providing education for our future generations. It is our duty to ensure all pupils always achieve their maximum potential. (**A Member:** Hear, hear.)

The school-leaving age in the United Kingdom, upon which we also base our educational models, is set at 16; but in the UK it is 16 if students then embark upon an apprenticeship or training type of employment. Will Gibraltar be able to provide skilled workers in traditional trades in the future if and when demands arise?

1345 Our post-Brexit future is still not settled. We know that in the UK pupils can remain in school at least until attaining the age of 18. We have in this past year reviewed our local school-leaving age. I am glad in a manner that the Minister for Education discussed the Bill with me before its final presentation in Parliament, and although there was a slight disagreement at least we could agree that the school-leaving age should be set at 16.

1350 However, a pupil in Gibraltar still does not enjoy the automatic right to embark upon an approved training programme until the age of 18, unlike their counterparts in the UK. Therefore, we do not have equal opportunities offering to the less academic achievers as that offered to their peers who end up qualifying for mandatory scholarships.

1355 Madam Speaker, our post-Brexit future is still not settled. At present we depend heavily upon imported labour in respect of certain trades, so I must ask: why can we not be self-sufficient in this field by offering adequate skills training leading to accredited qualifications?

I very joyfully noted down what Minister Santos offered today. He started to give us the first set of figures of intakes of apprenticeships. It is something close to my heart. I do not know if that Minister is aware or not, but I will be like a pebble in his sandals. I will be a pain in the neck to him.

1360 Over 20 years ago, as an ordinary civil servant I was given a responsibility to handle what at the time we enjoyed, European Social Fund funding. One of the projects that I had to administer was actually vocational training and the training of skills and so on.

1365 So I am well-acquainted through that experience and that of being a teacher of the different levels needed to be crossed in the different stages and well acquainted with the facilities that over 20 years on might need improving, which is why I am trying to encourage you to absorb this under the new college of education and skills and digital skills and so on.

I can be your best ally or I can be your biggest nightmare. So, Minister Santos, I look forward to exchanging ideas with you.

1370 Madam Speaker, whilst desiring only the very best in respect of whatever educational reforms may be required over the next few years, I cannot end without reinforcing that the views of the professionals in this field must be heard and acted upon.

1375 There is no better formula for success than to cultivate a sense of ownership amongst all professionals tasked with the education of our children. Furthermore, the GSD believes that schoolteachers are a priority that is both needed and from which society will receive huge benefits. The job that they do, benefits everyone. Teachers are a key contributory factor towards the success of our future adults and their aspirations in the adult world.

I reinforce: to all those teachers who go the extra mile, I thank you on behalf of all parents for assisting and thus enabling our youngsters to attain even greater successes than past generations have done.

1380 At present there are great and serious concerns unfortunately expressed by teachers around poor behaviour management at secondary schools. Concerns have also been expressed by parents and these, unfortunately again, seem to be growing. Therefore, I sincerely hope that the Senior Education Team, together with our Minister, will be able to work jointly and adequate resources be provided so that we can jointly tackle any behavioural issues in our schools as soon as possible and in a satisfactory manner.

1385 Through Questions I have recently asked in respect of if Government had issued guidance and/or policy directions to school staff on transgender/diverse issues. The Minister replied saying that this was being worked upon, so I was surprised that my friend the Hon. Minister made no reference to this matter during his contribution in this debate.

1390 Perhaps the Minister for Equality, now that he sits here in this House, might wish to have a session and together we can come to some successful guidelines to our teaching staff.

1395 Madam Speaker, no one has been more critical of Government spending than the GSD have over the last few years. We have advocated prudence and pointed to the dangers of uncontrolled spending and we continue to do so. This does not, however, amount to austerity. It is about prioritising Government spending in areas where it is needed or where, as a society, we are going to get the greatest benefit, and I firmly believe education is one of those areas.

1400 Lastly, Madam Speaker, in respect of employment matters, I have asked in this House for updates in respect of Employment Tribunal matters, and I ask as often as the rules have allowed me to. It is sad and unfair to see that there are still some cases awaiting conclusions, some even waiting for a commencement date, in respect of employment disputes. Those who have grievances require final outcomes and I urge the Minister with responsibility for employment matters to take a personal interest and expedite the Employment Tribunal processes. Statistics show some claims have been waiting for years to be heard and this is unacceptable and I daresay could even be a breach of human rights.

1405 Madam Speaker, before I finally sit down, I must take this opportunity to thank you and all your staff at Parliament for the patient and professional way you have all, both collectively and individually, dealt with us Members. I know that you always try to remain calm and patient when dealing with Members on both sides of the House and I thank you sincerely for putting up with us 17 Members, each with their own personal and particular ways of being. **(A Member: Hear, hear.)**

1410 Madam Speaker, may you and your staff all enjoy a well-deserved summer recess and may the refurbishment of this building end up providing us all with better seats and better, eagerly awaited, adequate and updated facilities.

Who knows, Madam Speaker, maybe during the long summer days when we might venture to take the younger members of our family to enjoy facilities at our play parks we may even perhaps

1415 enjoy a bit of shade if the Government does decide to embark upon my recent recommendations to provide much-needed shaded areas for the benefit both of our children and for us elderly family members who look after them whilst they are safely enjoying playing, as children are rightly entitled to. *(Banging on desks)*

1420 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, after that what started like a rousing speech from the Hon. Mr Reyes, can I suggest that the House should now take a comfort and tea break to quarter to six?

Madam Speaker: All right. We will recess until quarter to six.

The House recessed at 5.18 p.m. and resumed its sitting at 5.45 p.m.

**The Appropriation Act 2024 —
Second Reading —
Debate continued**

1425 **Madam Speaker:** The Hon. D J Bossino.

Hon. D J Bossino: Madam Speaker, I will be replying to each of the contributions which have been made by the Members opposite on behalf of the Opposition. But before I do so, I wish to raise an issue. It is not a point of order but an issue of comment which I think was made by my friend Mrs Ladislaus in relation to the way that we are treated in this House, where there is absolutely no etiquette or courtesy as far as the timings of the speeches are concerned.

1430 So that people understand, Members of the Opposition – and I would hasten to add I am sure it applies to Members of the Government and indeed members of the staff and yourself – have absolutely no idea as to the timings of the speeches. That is a serious point because it really has an impact not just on those of us who have other professional commitments but also family commitments as well. It is absolutely unacceptable, and bizarre that there are about 17 to 20 people, other people beholden to the Hon. the Leader of the House, which happens to be the Chief Minister's diary.

1435 That is something which does not necessarily need to change as a result of any substantive changes to the Rules, but can simply be addressed if the hon. Member showed us more courtesy and more etiquette in that regard. No doubt, the hon. Member will respond to that particular point in his reply when it comes, and we still do not know when that reply is going to come.

1440 We hear a rumour mill which suggests that it is going to be tomorrow morning, *but it may not be*. So if one has appointments and all the rest of it, one has had to cancel them in the expectation when I finish, and I am the last speaker today, it is expected that the hon. Member will rise and adjourn to whenever he wishes, subject to his commitments and subject to his diary. *(Interjection)*

1445 Madam Speaker – no, the hon. Member says from a seated position, if he asks me, it should come from him and he should be advising all Members of the House and extending the courtesy to staff members as well. But the reality is that the Leader of the Opposition has been asking him about timings and dates and all the rest of it and he has not responded. He is a busy man, but this is a common and basic – *(Interjection)*

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Point of Order, Madam Speaker.

1450 I was asked yesterday at 18.56 by the Leader of the Opposition when I would be taking the reply, whether it would be Friday or next week. I replied at 21.02 and I said Friday. He thanked me for that, Madam Speaker.

1460 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** On a point of order, Madam Speaker, that is true. He will also reflect from his messages that I asked him a couple of times when the Budget would be and I did not get any reply. He knows that.

1465 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Yes, Madam Speaker, that is absolutely correct. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition sent me a message which I missed. He then sent me another message when I was not yet able to confirm to Government colleagues and we discussed in Cabinet two alternative dates, which depended on Government travel, (*Interjection*) not my travel, other Government Ministers' travel, to be able to determine the date. When we finally determined the date, I had not seen his message but I confirmed in the House on the day that we actually determined in the Cabinet when we would be taking the Budget, the day that we would be taking the Budget.

1470 The hon. Gentleman's point a moment ago was about the reply, and I had informed the Leader of the Opposition – and I assumed that when I informed the Leader of the Opposition, the Leader of the Opposition informs his team – when the reply was going to be.

1475 So I would ask the Hon. Mr Bossino not in relation to the rest of what he said, because of course I will deal with that in my reply, but in relation to my reply that he accept that the point he has made, given the information he now has, if he did not have it before, is actually incorrect.

Hon. D J Bossino: I do not recognise a point of order, Madam Speaker. The hon. Member – no!

1480 **Madam Speaker:** We have aired the situation. Now perhaps you can move on to your next point?

Hon. D J Bossino: I am grateful.

1485 What I would say by way of comment, by way of general comment which applies to pretty much all of the Members opposite, is that we have had a rather muted couple of days. I do not know what is wrong with them.

1490 Where is the political fire in their respective bellies? Are they really such a spent force of a Government that they cannot bring themselves to make fiery, robust political speeches, which we are used to from Members opposite? What is wrong with them? What is wrong with them? It has been almost bordering on the boring. I have been in this House, my only experience of this House is being in Opposition to the hon. Members' Governments since 2011, barring one stint when I did not stand for election. I am shocked. I am surprised. As I say, it is almost boring.

1495 It may be that what they have had is a reflection not just that they are a heavily weakened Government which has, as the Hon. Sir Joe Bossano said, only a one-person majority, but they have also had a very bad week. They have had a very bad start of this Budget session when we debate the Appropriation Bill. It is clearly an indication, if there ever was one, that we are witnessing the twilight months of this Administration.

1500 What I will seek to show, Madam Speaker, is how weak they are and how weak the Hon. the Chief Minister is, how dysfunctional they are, how contradictory they have been in their statements, and therefore how divided the current Administration is. All the attributes of a dying Government.

1505 Because we are seeing and witnessing before us a lame duck Chief Minister, a lame-duck Leader of this Government. That is what we are experiencing on the opposite side, a lame-duck Minister for Finance who manages all on his own to introduce probably the most ill-thought-out revenue-raising measure – and funnily for him because he is not used to doing that, it was a deeply unpopular measure, which was of course the pollution levy, which was subjected to a record-breaking U-turn. Within literally hours the hon. Member came to this House and U-turned on the policy he had announced in the morning. He did it straight after lunch.

As a result of political expediency, he shunted and put to one side all his environmentalist credentials and for political expediency backed down, just like they did in relation to the

1510 pedestrianisation of Line Wall Road and also the removal two years ago, and it has been referred to by my colleagues, of the company levy.

1515 Even the manner of the retraction was odd and strange. Because when he first announced it, there was absolutely no mention of any exceptions, that it would not apply to elderly citizens and all the rest of. That he said at the moment of the U-turn, *ex post facto*, when he realised that there was a problem. Then we expected that the Minister for Transport would have something to say about it – but I will deal with that in a moment.

1520 Are we to believe and accept that he is really so out of touch, that power over the last 12 years has gone to his head so much that he cannot see the reality out there, that this impact would have a very serious effect, particularly on the lower income bracket, those individuals in our society who have low incomes? Is he also that out of touch that he had the gall to say in his GBC interview, I think before we came back to the House, that he bought a Porsche to cheer himself up?

1525 I could not believe my eyes or ears when I saw and heard what he had said, but it may make sense because in evidence to the inquiry, to the now infamous inquiry, the McGrail Inquiry, he says that he is wealthier than he ever wanted to be as a lawyer and as a Chief Minister. That is what he said. In fact, he may be able to elucidate this House because as far as I know I thought that importation of 10-year-plus old cars was not in compliance with the law, but he may be able to elucidate in his reply.

His car crash tax, CCT for short, is akin to Thatcher’s poll tax and Theresa May’s dementia tax, and we all know where those two lady Tory MPs ended up. They both had to resign whilst in office.

1530 I am not seeking or asking for the hon. Member’s immediate resignation, but maybe it is something he could consider. His CCT was so flawed, technically and politically but particularly politically – and this is what surprises me of the hon. Gentleman, who I know and have known for a very long time – and I attribute to him a gift in terms of political manoeuvring and getting to the place that he wants to be by hook or by crook. That he does have.

1535 He is a tactician by nature and by approach and that – he may see it as an attribute, some people would see it as a criticism – he goes for it and he gets it and he has had an ambition to be Chief Minister since being at school and he pursued it and he has made it. Very well.

1540 But I find it surprising that he should make such an error to the extent that I am told that actually it is all part of a deflection tactic. That he has not made an innocent error. That it is a deflection, to deflect the people’s attention from the unpopular measures that he has had to introduce: like the increase to 15% tax and also the increase in social insurance. Two measures which have already received the criticism and opprobrium from the Chamber of Commerce very quickly and the Catering Association.

1545 But I suggest another possibility. Are there dark forces at play, Mr Feetham? Are there dark forces at play? (*Interjection*) Is it the Bossano/Feetham leadership campaign which are up to their tactics in order to malign the current leader of their party? Is it that?

1550 Or have they been prompted into action as a result of the indication as a result of the indication from the Hon. Chief Minister that actually he is not going to be going that quickly after all. By our own calculations the hon. Gentleman is going to be there at least until April 2027, months before the general election needs to be called. Is that why the wolves within his party are already making more strident and confident moves?

Is that it? (*Interjection*) Because the hon. Members, no one believes the Hon. Minister for Health, the putative leader of the party, when she says that there are no *Hunger Games*, and accuses us of *Game of Thrones*. I mean, come on.

1555 It is very palpable, it is very obvious. She kept on emphasising during the course of her contribution the word ‘together’. ‘We are all together’. Looking around to the left, to the right, ‘We are together’. All that showed from this perspective is a massive guilty conscience. It was a defensive mechanism. It was very obvious. This is so much fun actually seeing it being played out on the other side.

1560 Because the political reality, Madam Speaker, is that the hon. Gentleman has lost his political mojo. That is correct.

1565 It happens. It is normal. He is at the end of his political career, certainly as leader. Look, he may carry on in another capacity but certainly as leader of this community he is coming to the end. He told people publicly during the course of the election campaign. But he is now like Tony Blair after the WMD controversy where anything that gentleman said nobody believed him. Nobody believed him. This is why the hon. Gentleman has lost his political mojo.

This is now not just about the car tax. My hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition and I attended with Mrs Sanchez. The people who were out there were not just talking about the car tax. They are fed up with him and his Government. They are fed up with them. They are deeply unpopular.

1570 What the car tax did was it broke the camel's back, and what we saw and witnessed – last Monday, I think it was, it feels so long ago now – was pent-up frustration. That is what it was. People were talking about issues of housing, employment, all the rest of it. Because they wanted them out. In fact, asking us how it would be possible to kick them out. This is what they were fed up and concerned about.

1575 Let me quote to him what another resigning Prime Minister said, a Prime Minister who also had to resign from office, Mr Boris Johnson, when he said – talking about his colleagues on the back benches, but in this case it applies to the people of Gibraltar:

... the herd instinct is powerful and when the herd moves, it moves.

And there is nothing you can do about it.

1580 Look, Madam Speaker, we all know what the hon. Gentlemen and Ladies opposite had been up to during the course of their contributions. We all know it. He in particular – again, I do not know what is wrong with him – uncharacteristically for him gave a rather short speech and actually it was quite anodyne as well.

1585 But my theory is this, and let's see if I am proven right: it was simply to justify his soon-to-be – whenever it happens, tomorrow, next week, next Monday, we will get to it – his vicious attacks on us which we predict he will deploy with full vigour and fervour tomorrow morning. The hon. Gentleman opposite is the one – certainly in my experience in this House, since 2011 – who has raised the bar of viciousness, corrosion and toxicity to a level that we are only learning to match.

Because as an Opposition we have to fight fire with fire. There is no other way of doing it. Yet, he complains when I say that we are here to attack. I mean, come on.

1590 Now, all of a sudden, they have all developed this very thin skin it seems. But we are responding to their attacks, that is what we are doing, and we do so with fervour and passion and conviction but with respect, and with respect always. And what we have been doing since 2011 ...

1595 I mean, for goodness sakes, anybody who is old enough or who has followed Gibraltar politics over the last 30 or 40 years will know that this has got nothing to do with the way that they conducted opposition. Indeed, the way that Sir Joe Bossano conducted opposition from when he formed the party opposite in 1976, all the way through to 1988, and then again when he was booted out of office from 1996 to 2011.

1600 When he used the union and there were strikes galore everybody knew what was happening. It was a *vicious* opposition against Sir Joshua Hassan until he was toppled. It took him 16 years. Then the same with Sir Peter Caruana and the GSD, and how he utilised the dockyard to create an industrial strike.

They are pretending now to be cute little bambis. Come on, nobody believes that.

1605 I could not believe my ears when I heard the Hon. Sir Joe Bossano – with the greatest of respect to him – to say that they do not question when we have failed to deliver in Government our electoral promises. That was jaw-dropping stuff, as were other things he said which were equally jaw-dropping.

We are not going to take lessons – again with the greatest of respect to my friend, the Deputy Chief Minister – who went as far as to suggest that we were undermining the democratic process. I do not know where he gets that from.

1610 I know that they are trying to paint a picture that somehow we are election-result deniers. How are we undermining the democratic process? We accept it. We are here, by a very small margin and with a composition of the House which, since the new Constitution was introduced, is the first time that we have a 9:8 distribution of seats. *Very small margin.*

1615 But we have no argument with the result, let me make that absolutely clear. What we have is an argument with the way they won the election. That is where we have an argument with them in relation to that, because the result – and this is something that we could have done – was so close, and had it been closer we could have legitimately sought a recount, but we did not. We accepted it, despite the narrowness of the absolute votes difference between the Members opposite and us. They had that look, and that would have been a legitimate course of action to have embarked upon but we did not. So we respect the result.

1620 What we complain about is that the electorate did *not* come to an informed decision because they did not present a true picture, and I will go into that shortly. They did not present a true picture because goodness knows how different the result may have been had they done so.

1625 Then, once again, the Hon. Sir Joe Bossano talks about him complaining again, with the newfound thin skin of the hon. Gentleman who has been now in this House since 1972 – when he and I were born, so 52 years – when he complained that he was being targeted personally by us.

We do not recognise that. We do not recognise that we did that.

1630 He says, and I quote him: 'I have learnt something about the sort of people' ... Now, that is respectful, 'the sort of people ... who are now representing the GSD in this House'. He has always done that.

In 1992 when he won that whopping still-to-be-beaten victory at 72% or 73% of the vote, he said exactly the same thing in a super-patronising – no scolding Peter, as he then was – Caruana and the GSD team. But he also did it to the AACR, as I have said before to Mr Canepa, to Mr Hassan and to Mr Caruana. And what about the vicious attacks that we have been subjected to?

1635 Let's set the record straight. What about the vicious attacks that we have *personally* been subjected to? Some of us? Mrs Sanchez was subjected to personal attacks during the campaign.

I am not necessarily going to, because I cannot recall, attribute that to their official accounts.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: It was.

1640 **Hon. D J Bossino:** And it was, I am told by the Leader of the Opposition. An official account attacks Mrs Sanchez personally. Certainly the one which was an official account was a personal attack on the Leader of the Opposition, based on an untruth, because you can attack on something which is based on truth, which is that if you vote for Azopardi you get Andorra. It is not true!

1645 He never said that and he proved that to be the case because he managed to find the video of the debate so it was beyond all reasonable doubt! The prosecution would not have succeeded. The man was and is innocent of that charge. That is a personal attack, but it is very disappointing, but we have to accept it, I suppose that is the nature of politics. I hope it does not get any worse than that because it will be a sad place.

1650 Then the Hon. Sir Joe Bossano talks about the incredible attempt to overturn the Sovereign Right of Parliament to determine policy by a majority vote of one. Where does he get that from? We accept that they have a majority in this House. He mentioned that in the context of the passing of the Inquiries Bill, and that we went to see the Governor in relation to that.

1655 But again, he says these things based on complete and utter fiction, as indeed the Hon. Chief Minister did the same. He accused us of entertaining direct rule. I mean, what? Nonsense, based once again on an untrue and inaccurate premise. Where does he get that from?

As we said in our statement, and the Hon. Leader of the Opposition in our statement at the time produced the relevant excerpt of his letter, the email I think it was, to the then Governor, and I quote where he says:

As my request made clear, what we ask is to formally record our views to you ...

1660 – in other words, the Governor –

... on this important matter, I have not suggested in any communication that I am going to seek to persuade you on whether to assent to this Bill ...

– which is what the hon. Members opposite were suggesting we had done –

... I am very conscious ...

– the Hon. the Leader of the Opposition says:

... of the boundaries here and I have no intention of crossing lines that I view should not be crossed. That judgement is a matter for you ...

– i.e. the Governor –

... within the constitutional provisions and I intend to make no submissions or requests in that regard.

1665 It is very clear what the truth is. If anybody is sensitive about the roles and responsibilities and the boundary lines in this House, it is the Hon. Leader of the Opposition (**A Member:** Hear, hear.) who is an expert, legally, in relation to these matters and has written about this extensively.

So let's get these things right and let's not play reverse psychology games with us because actually it certainly does not persuade us, it is not going to make us nervous in any way because we know we are supported by the truth and veracity.

1670 Then the Chief Minister says, 'We put Gibraltar first every time'. This is in criticism of us. What on earth does he think we do on this side of the House and when we see people outside Gibraltar, and we are here to represent 50% of the Gibraltarian electorate? This is what we do every time and he needs to understand that.

1675 What we seek to do is to remove him and his colleagues from office as soon as possible; because we think that is necessary; because we think that is good for Gibraltar; because we think it is absolutely necessary that their term in office ends as soon as possible. But of course democratically speaking and under the relevant legal and constitutional rules, so at this stage unless the hon. Gentleman calls a snap and early election, we have to wait another three and a half years or however many months, that he referred to I think in one of the answers to the

1680 questions.

But the reality is that the Hon. Mr Picardo does not like – and this is why he is in such an uppity and bad mood it seems these days – he does not like to be reminded of his weakness. Because we know – and those who know us and know him personally – that his ego suffered a huge blow on 12th October, the date of the election. Not only was he only able to scrape through in terms of his

1685 team by a small number of votes we, in effect, have I think probably the weakest Government in Gibraltar's recent political history. Because he was, in an unprecedented way, unable to secure a seat for his colleague, Mr Daryanani.

The reality is that we are – and I did not realise until the Hon. Leader of the Opposition mentioned it at the inaugural session of the House – the biggest party in this Chamber at the

1690 moment because they are split. They are not split in political colour terms, they are split in other ways and I will go into that now.

But they are split in terms of their political origin, that they are two different parties. Some would argue that they are really one and the same and they have been since they joined together in the year 2000. But we are the biggest party.

1695 Dwelling for a moment on Mr Daryanani, whom he now praises and attributes the larger and more attractive numbers that we are seeing within the tourist sector. He talks about the receipts and he says that these are all due to the efforts of Mr Daryanani. The reality is, without taking away from the shine, that what we are doing here – let's be honest and objective – is playing

1700 catch-up from the bad COVID days and that is why we are, thank goodness, beyond that and seeing an increase.

But he says – I do not think he mentioned me personally but I know he was referring to me when he says that he was much maligned by me – that he was attacked unfairly and unjustifiably by me. But if that is the case, how then does he explain that the hon. Gentleman is not here with us today? That he does not have a seat?

1705 He should respect the democratic judgement and verdict which was passed by the people of Gibraltar. They must have agreed with me and what we were saying about his discharge of his duties and *not with him*. Then he says that whenever one of his own are attacked he will be there. He will be there to defend them. Where was his defence?

1710 If there was a defence it clearly was not very successful because they are down by one and the Liberal Party has lost one Member of its team. The reality is – and everybody knows this, and the Leader of the Opposition made a reference to it during the course of his intervention – they were scrounging around for votes during the course of the election campaign.

1715 Days before, letters were flying around the place and we could not believe our eyes when we saw these letters. Every possible interest group, every possible group that had a desire for things from the Government, they were granted it. But that is true to form. That is how the hon. Members won the 2011 election. We nearly won our fifth term.

But they did the same and they only won that election by a whisker, much more than they won the last one. These are promises which we know the hon. Gentleman will not be delivering.

1720 This is a lame-duck Chief Minister, as I have said, who only weakened his position further – and this is why he is a lame duck – by indicating that he will be relinquishing his position during the course of this term.

1725 Alastair Campbell in a podcast – which I know he is fond of, and I am fond of too, although I have not had much time to listen to it recently, *'The Rest is Politics'* – made a reference, and this was in the context of the Modi third election win in India. I think at the time they were still counting votes so he was not sure but the strong indications were that he had won, but that he had won by not the landslide that was expected, he had only just won.

I quote Alistair Campbell, because I thought it was of interest, when he says:

Political authority is one of those things that you cannot always measure. Even if you win ...

– as Modi says he has, this is Alastair Campbell, he is going to be the Prime Minister for a third term –

... political authority is an intangible but unbelievably important currency.

1730 He has lost that currency. He knows it. The Ministers around him know it because they are all already flying around his political carcass like vultures. And all this business that they are all together and all hunky dory, I am sorry, we are not buying it.

1735 We saw it in full – borrowing your word 'technicolour' from Mr Feetham – on Father's Day when he wished everybody a Happy Father's Day we did not get the connection because there it was a direct challenge to his leader and to the Hon. Chief Minister where basically he was saying he is not going to have any of it. This is not going to be a passing of the baton just because he, the Hon. Chief Minister, wishes to pass it on to the Hon. Minister for Health. He is not going to have it!

1740 He must have sensed – I think it was at the time that it had been announced, or the hon. Lady had gone already – that she was being subjected to favouritism. He was not going to have it, because he challenged it by saying that if the Members so wish it – although he claims not to have any political ambition – he will offer himself to be leader of the GSLP. Good for him. But that was an immediate, clear challenge of the Hon. the Chief Minister's authority.

1745 As I say, I think his feathers must have been ruffled by the obvious favouritism, that preferred treatment that the Hon. Minister for Health, Mrs Vasquez, was receiving. This declaration of war

we suspect has the support of Sir Joe Bossano. That is the Bossano true socialist – and a bit more about that later – camp of the party. Clearly also the support of the Hon. the Minister for Housing who made a complimentary comment to that post.

1750 But what one can say about the Hon. Mr Nigel Feetham, the Minister for Tax, Financial Services and all the rest of it, is that he is certainly leaving no stone unturned in pursuance of his leadership bid. Our *Twitter* feeds have been alight since 12th October. There is not a meeting with an interest group, a financial services provider, that he does not attend and does not then show the wider public, whether on Instagram, on Twitter, on Facebook, on the *Chronicle*.

1755 With tie, without tie, with his jumper. His jumper has overstayed its welcome. His jumper is always on his shoulders. That was Mr Feetham's style. The hyperactive Mr Feetham which we have seen everywhere. It is now clear that it is in pursuance of his leadership bid, despite his earlier protestations that he was not interested.

1760 But let me give the hon. Gentleman a word of warning (*Interjection*) because I do not think at this stage it has been said about the Hon. Mr Feetham. [*Interjection*] What the hon. Members say from a sedentary position we are not to ignore, unless it is being contrary to the rules.

But he needs to be warned that he is not going to go unscathed and that we are not going to be reminding him and the general public of his relatively recent political history and activity. Because the hon. Gentleman was a very active Member of *this* party, of the GSD.

1765 I do not think the others can say it, not even the Leader of the Opposition, he and I shared an executive table together – yes! – for a number of years. (*Interjection*) But he was an equally active Member of this party in support of the then leadership to topple the Hon. the Chief Minister and to topple this Government, which is what we continued to seek to do. But he was trying to do the same, not on this side of the House but certainly being a full and active Member of the Gibraltar Social Democrats.

1770

Hon. E J Reyes: I remember.

Hon. D J Bossino: Sorry, Mr Reyes also remembers, of course.

1775 But let me move the historical dial a bit further back and let me remind Members that the Hon. Mr Feetham also left and resigned in a rather dramatic way the GSLP, the party to which in effect he was born into.

That was really the GSLP, for the Feethams were very much a part of the DNA of the GSLP and the GSLP was part of the DNA of the Feethams. Mr Picardo came later.

1780 But the reality is they had no compunction to then separate, legitimately so, and formed the Labour Party. That is the hon. Member's political history which we will remind people should he make a move. Well he has already made a move, is my argument, and no doubt he will defend that position.

1785 But let me warn him about something else. Let me warn him about the Chief Minister, because he had no compunction in reminding us – and I think it may have been a slip of the tongue – when he talked about the supposed dirty deeds of the *other* Mr Feetham when he talked about, I think he said, 'A spree of job creation in advance of the 2011 General Election', 8th December 2011, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, we will not forget that. (*Interjection*)

1790 But does the Chief Minister not recall that the Minister – Mr Feetham, the Minister now – was a member of our party at the time so, therefore, arguably complicit in the actions of the other Mr Feetham. So he has got to be careful about what he says and remind himself of certain historical political, basic facts like that. (*Interjection*) Fair enough.

With the hon. Lady, all I can say is I am not sure what is happening there. She is clearly the Hon. Chief Minister's protégé, as I have said, and she has been for many years. He has said so expressly and we all know that to be the case, even from her student days, if I am not mistaken.

1795 She is the chosen one. By any stretch of the imagination she is the chosen one, although there was a bit of a blip when the Hon. Mr Feetham then declared his intention to stand for leadership, then Mr Picardo I think was less than confident in terms of his support of the Minister for Health.

1800 But she must have thought that the much-coveted role – i.e. being Chief Minister – for her, was going to be handed over to her on a plate. But the reality is she has been burdened with one of the most heavy Departments.

The hon. Lady spent what was two and a half hours – because she said and she warned us that her speech in the contribution was going to be long – because she has so many things to cover, and Health is a heavy one. Of course the problem there for her is that she will not be able to get her head above the parapet dealing with the administrative side of running a Department.

1805 The political things, the Hon. Mr Feetham already has a head start. I do not know whether he has more time or the nature of his Departments are less strenuous in terms of the hours that he has spent, he is able to do the politics.

1810 The hon. Lady, the only thing that I have been able to identify that she has been able to do – because that was certainly handed over to her on a plate – the Hon. the Deputy Chief Minister was meant to go, he was not able to go, the Hon. the Chief Minister for some reason did not go, we do not know why; and then she was able to attend the United Nations in New York. That was a *huge* opportunity for her.

1815 But other than that, I think she has to be careful and take advice from me that she needs to do other things and do a bit more of the politics, (*Interjection*) because the hon. Lady was unable to show that she has politics running in her blood, that she really feels it.

When she last presented the motion in this House she completely sidestepped what I had to say – that is fine, I do not take it personally – on the basis that I had dealt with the politics of it. What is it that we are doing here? This is politics. This is a political Chamber.

1820 She had the opportunity to show the strength of character that she has as a firebrand Member of the Socialist Party that she is going to lead. She missed that opportunity and put it to one side and bypassed my comments. So she needs to improve her campaigning skills.

I cannot leave this topic without mentioning where is the hon. Professor in all of this? I am not suggesting that because he is not here, I do not want to make that comment.

1825 I am taking this context: I am told I think on good authority that he is sulking somewhere in a corner. He does not like any of this. I am not saying now, because I am told that he is actually not enjoying it any more. The first thing that happened was that he was divested of his responsibilities for Culture, which was very close to his heart and is now being run by Mr Santos.

1830 He is then given Transport, which I am told he dislikes immensely. Then, to boot, he is saying all these manoeuvres. Because the chance of aspiring for greater things – and the Chief Minister was not here during his speech, but I will go into it now – his opportunity is fast passing him by.

This must be very sad for the hon. Gentleman who is very fond of his Llanito and he is pursuing that. The hon. Gentleman does not have a grandmother, because he is always talking about himself and his ego and the ‘me’ and the ‘I’ and ‘I do this’, and ‘I have been appointed this’. So this must hurt him a lot. Another one with a very thin skin.

1835 Then he expects us to believe that, ‘I am not really a politician’, credentials are still there. Nobody believes that any more, because he said – and I will enlighten the Hon. the Chief Minister who was not here when his colleague gave his contribution, so he can continue with his diary commitments but we cannot – is that he said, and I quote, ‘*El Jardinero* is capable of more’.

1840 He actually said that he intends to be here for life, forgetting the democratic processes which need to happen at least, maximum, every four years. He is going to be here for life, like a tinpot dictator, or like Sir Joe Bossano, and he expects us to believe that he is not really a politician.

I think that was a subliminal declaration of war as well, that the Hon. Mr Cortes also has his eye in the leadership, and I am told that he does. The hon. Gentleman opposite may not know this but I am told that he does.

1845 But I need to tell him that he does not have much support on the other side. Because I can tell him for free, the fact is that neither the current leader of the GSLP, his party, or the former immediate predecessor of the current leader, Sir Joe Bossano, were here to hear him. I tell him for free that that was as snub.

1850 That was a direct snub to the hon. Gentleman. Sir Joe Bossano has only been here to listen to a part of the hon. mover of this Bill's speech, but then has given his contribution and then not come back. We have not seen him since; he has disappeared.

And I do not like saying that because people have their own obligations and all the rest of it, but he kept on saying it about me four or five years ago, and I thought that was very unfair so I am treating him in the same manner.

1855 I do not know. Maybe Mr Cortes will be content to be there in effect for a Minister with his relations with Morocco. But he was very quick to disassociate himself from a measure which I would have thought the hon. Gentleman would have introduced, which is the CCT. He was very quick to disassociate himself by saying, much more stridently than the Chief Minister – because the Chief Minister qualified it, 'I had said this' or 'This was our intention' – it is not going to happen.
1860 He said 'No way'. That is what the hon. Gentleman said.

He scurries off into *'el cuarto de la salud'* and slams the door on the face of the Chief Minister. 'Nothing to do with me, Guv' – this is the Minister for the Environment. And, let me add, the Minister for Transport.

1865 My good friend, the Hon. the Deputy Chief Minister, in his usual way is putting his head down and he is seeing his own personal success, because he had a personal vote, whilst the Chief Minister did not, he came second in the listings. Pretty much unprecedented, in fact I would add, unprecedented for a sitting Chief Minister to be treated this way and to receive this type of result from the electorate.

1870 He is seeing it evaporating from his eyes because he is not using that in some way to take over the top job. But I suspect it has got to do (*Interjection*) that he knows that the Government is in its twilight years, as I have put to hon. Members, and that the time has come to switch out the lights and go home.

1875 If he were to do that, I wonder, it would be interesting to see what happens with the alliance, because the alliance is only being kept together, as far as I can see, because of the deep relationship that there is with the current main officeholders of the parties opposite. If one or the other goes I query whether the alliance will continue, because there have been rumblings now for many years and I think they became even more intense and acute before the last election when people on the GSLP side were getting rather annoyed with who were potential candidates, that three of the slots were being occupied by the Liberals.

1880 That relationship has now outspent and overstayed its welcome. The only thing that is keeping it together is the obvious glue that there is between the hon. Gentleman opposite. But the question is: what would happen should that dynamic end when one or both of them leave those positions?

1885 What I would ask the Hon. the Deputy Chief Minister to do is to pre-empt that and come over to our side. I make that offer for free, *gratis*, he can come over and we can enter at least into negotiations. He is more than entitled.

1890 He has entered into that arrangement with the hon. Gentleman opposite, he has won two seats, unfortunately he did not win the third – when the Liberals have done well – and come with us; and then we can have a motion of no confidence passed and we can call a general election or alternatively we simply become the Government. *That* he is capable and able to do, and I would ask him to consider it. (*Interjection*) Something to consider for him.

1895 But whoever wins – whether it is a 'he' or a 'she' – that leader will also be a lame-duck leader because according to the Hon. the Chief Minister, I think he was suggesting from a sedentary position. He was denying that the chronology was wrong, that he was going to be staying there until April 2027 according to their internal constitutional arrangements in the GSLP. So, when the person takes over, we will very quickly need to start considering what date to set for the next general election.

Then, if one knows one's political history, you end up in a situation like Adolfo Canepa did when Sir Joshua Hassan left in autumn 1987 and the man had to call the election for 24th March 1988,

1900 and he lost it. Because whoever takes over will have to defend at that stage, 14-16 years of Government. It is very difficult to do. And they are deeply unpopular, as I have argued.

1905 It is very obvious and evident by the election results. So, today our compatriots in the United Kingdom are voting and it has been very difficult for Mr Sunak because he has had to defend 14 years of Conservative rule. That is what is going to befall the successor. So that is where we are.

As I have said, the Government is divided and we have the Bossano camp on one side and the Picardo camp on the other and the cracks are only deepening before our very eyes.

1910 And in a further challenge – and this is *very* important because it goes to the core of what the hon. Gentlemen and Women have been doing since Brexit – we have had the letter from Sir Joe Bossano on 10th June, which was published in the *Chronicle*, and if that was not a throwing of the gauntlet, I do not know what is.

1915 When he came out from hiding, in reaction to a piece written by the editor of the *Chronicle*, when he was talking, I think what Sir Joe was sensing was some justification by Mr Reyes about the need for Spanish boots on the ground, so to speak, if I can use it, for Spanish officials in our Port and Airport.

Just before I carry on, I heard over the weekend that Sir Joe is also going to be a contender for the leadership of the party. I had it on good authority. Let's see if it happens. Yes, we are selling the popcorn at GSD HQ. (*Interjection*)

1920 The Chief Minister wishes us to believe that his position is totally aligned with that of Sir Joe Bossano, but that of course is to ignore the politics of the statements and the messaging that we are seeing, because a lot of what Sir Joe Bossano said was fine. It was fine, it was kind of the Government's position, more stridently in favour of a no deal, and I will go into that in a bit more depth now.

1925 But his last statement, and I will quote it, he says, 'If it is a question of who blinks first, as some people have suggested –' (**A Member:** You.) I have not suggested that! He is probably talking about Members opposite, as some people have suggested, 'For the record I' – not we the Cabinet, as the Hon. Chief Minister says – 'I, Joe Bossano, never blink'. That is Joe Bossano through and through.

1930 But the suggestion which is being made there is that he personally is the only possible bulwark to any progression towards a deal which the Hon. the Chief Minister may be prepared or otherwise to countenance. This came through very clearly during the course of the speeches.

1935 On the one hand you had the Chief Minister looking at ways of getting the deal over the line, and that is a respectful position. And in the context of the discharging of the various legal responsibilities under Schengen, he said, 'There are many ways to skin a cat' the hon. Gentleman said. That is the language of diplomacy *par excellence*, if there ever was one.

Totally different. Totally at loggerheads with what Sir Joe was saying.

1940 The difference in approach was also very evident with the Deputy Chief Minister when he quite rightly was warning of the dangers. That was the main focus of his speech about the dangers of a 'no-deal' scenario, saying that this benefits the bridging measures which we enjoy as a result of the unilateral measures taken by Spain – we are not entitled to that – would end should there be no treaty, or certainly there is a big risk of that.

1945 He said in very stark, dramatic terms in terms of the content of what he said – and he is right, that Gibraltar cannot remain as it is today. That is what the Hon. the Deputy Chief Minister was saying. He says we cannot stay as we are. The language of warning, the language of concern, the language of staring at the abyss, if we do not have a deal. And the Chief Minister, 'There are various ways of skinning a cat'.

1950 But then we had *Braveheart* in Sir Joe Bossano when, in his contribution, where in effect he was proceeding on the premise he has done it before, although on this occasion it was even more strident because if I recall, in the last Appropriation Bill debate that we had, what he said was, 'Fabian Picardo wants an enduring deal'. Joe Bossano says, 'Four years and then we are not going

to accept Spanish officers on the ground so we are not going to have a deal'. Okay? Stark difference.

1955 Here it was worse, in effect he is saying, 'The strategy is a reduction of dependence on the hinterland'. Completely different. That is his strategy. That is what he wants to achieve. The approach is totally different. He talked about a repositioning of the economy but the unpalatable reality that the Hon. the Deputy Chief Minister was talking about, that did not form part of his speech.

1960 Can I, therefore, ask the Hon. the Deputy Chief Minister to have a quiet word with Sir Joe and make him realise what it is that this community is facing should there be no deal? Can he have that conversation with him, because the Hon. Sir Joe Bossano is in a completely siege mentality state of mind, as is normally the case. **(A Member: Baked beans.)** Baked beans, indeed.

Then Sir Joe Bossano builds his position on the basis of his National Economic Plan, and he is very proud, he says, that they are the only party who had a plan should there not be a deal since the 2019 manifesto, and he has repeated it.

1965 In essence, and put in the simplest terms as possible, what this basically is, is a reliance on the Savings Bank money, of which there is a nice little gold pot there, for now. That is what it is, because they have raided the cash from the other accounts. We have got a few millions of pounds here. People invest, you give them good interest rates and it is normal, people are going to invest because you have a very attractive rate, and they probably think, 'This is a good investment'. And he is using that money.

1970 And people that are Members here know the different ... It might be the Hon. the Chief Minister is right as far as one thing is concerned: there is very clearly a blue line between them and us on that issue, because it is the Hon. Sir Joe Bossano who takes all the decisions *himself*. It is not even at Cabinet level! It is not even consulted!

1975 We think with the Hon. the Minister for Finance, Sir Joe Bossano is the one who takes all the decisions, and then once he takes the decisions it is permeated through this – I cannot think of a better word, because I am a bit bored – oh, yes, I was going to say 'web' but that is a bit 1990's – it is actually a *jungle* of companies in respect of which Mr Clinton is criticised when he wants details.

1980 This is dangerous stuff. And then he tries to persuade us to support his National Economic Plan. But how can we support his National Economic Plan if we do not know what it is, other than the basics?

1985 How can we reach a value judgement as to whether this is a safe investment? Because at the end of the day this is a complete conflation of kind of hybrid private companies, in respect of which he says, 'The Chief Minister says he cannot answer questions because they are outside the Government's remit'. And a bit more about that later.

1990 But then they are doing public stuff, building houses, building pensioners' homes, building a stadium. I simply do not understand. When we asked last week – it feels again like it was last month – about the close to £200 million that was spent through this company, Sir Joe was not there so therefore he was not able to answer, and I think the Chief Minister built up a brick wall simply because I think deep down he had to defend the position because he does not know what is going.

1995 Then he treated us to a word salad, to the point that we were looking at each other, confused, saying, 'What the hell is the hon. Gentleman saying?' I have some nice quotes about word salads which I think apply. The word salad will look like deflecting the blame and changing the subject. The goal of this tactic is to confuse the hell out of you using long, convoluted sentences that will do just that. That is what the Hon. Chief Minister embarked upon.

2000 I could not believe my ears. We could not believe our ears. He was as clear as mud. He was making no sense. The very clear and undeniable fact – and this is one of the reasons why they cannot obtain our support – is that in effect what we are dealing with here is a parallel Government under the command and authority solely and exclusively of Sir Joe Bossano and nobody else. Nobody else on that side and certainly nobody else on this side. This is a paradigm.

2005 And we, the Opposition – sorry, not we the Opposition, we the people of Gibraltar are not sighted. Decisions are taken politically by Sir Joe Bossano and then executed through Government companies, which completely – despite their protestations – offend basic principles of openness and democratic governance.

Things could have been so different, as I alluded to earlier, because being the democrat that the Hon. the Chief Minister claims he is, he says he is keen to be open and transparent. He is keen to ensure that there is fair play, being the equivalent of a political saint.

2010 Why did he not ensure that the McGrail Inquiry happened before the last general election? Why did he not ensure, as it was his gift to do so, to have had the Principal Auditor's report published *before* the last general election? And we still do not have the complete version, it only goes up to a certain year. We are still waiting for the next one.

2015 Because he has got two options here: why was he not more transparent and honest to the people of Gibraltar as to what the real state of play was as respects the Brexit negotiations, when he said in the hustings and in the campaign that they were at kissing distance to the Spanish press, at 0.01%.

2020 We started to get it wrong when we said 0.1% – 0.01%. Here we are, nine months down the line almost and there is still nothing. Such a pity because we are totally and utterly convinced that if the people of Gibraltar had been aware of the reality there would have been a completely different result and we would have been on that side of the House and they would have been on this side of the House.

What they have been subjecting the electorate to is a hiding and delaying of basic truths, very similar to the NHS Brexit bus slogan, the infamous one now, at the time of the Brexit referendum.

2025 We have already said, Madam Speaker, that we will be reserving our comments on the McGrail Inquiry, save for a few things that we have said here and there.

2030 Something which is totally and utterly different in terms of the behaviour of hon. Gentlemen opposite who have used their newspaper, the *New People*, to give almost a daily account of their one-sided spin as to what has been happening. We have not said anything about it, other than a few comments here and there. But one broad point can be made – and it has indeed been made by the Leader of the Opposition, the spectacle – and one good thing that has happened I think here is that we have had live streaming of these proceedings, people have been watching it.

2035 The spectacle they have been watching nevertheless is a sad indictment of the malaise that pervades our Government, lines blurred, lack of arm's-length dealings, documentary evidence of what should have been official meetings lost or not taken, to name just but a few.

This has to change. But I and we are convinced that the only way that this is going to change is should we be returned to office. That is the only way that this attitude, this approach to governance, is going to be changing.

2040 Because it is very obvious – and there is evidence of that – that the hon. Gentleman has learnt nothing from his experience. He continues in his normal way unabated. His view of life is undiminished when he appointed Peter Montegriffo as the Chairman of the Gibraltar Police Authority. The Opposition was very clear as to what his position was in relation to that.

2045 On the Principal Auditor's report, we have also seen how in certain projects there was a lack of adherence to tender regulations, verification of payments, examination of project documentation, evaluation of planning, project management, alignment of info. The list simply goes on. There was simply a general lack of accountability, governance and transparency.

This is without really being sighted on what Government companies are doing and the contracts that they receive because I understand the Principal Auditor does not have oversight over these things.

2050 Madam Speaker, dealing briefly with Rooke Residential Home. This is another of these much-vaunted projects under the National Economic Plan, which as it stands is costing by way of loans the Saving Bank almost £40 million – £38 million. From the answers that we have received from Sir Joe Bossano it may actually be rising and probably likely to rise. This was much vaunted by the Hon. Sir Joe as a project which is going to be completing in months. It should have completed last

2055 June, and now it is the subject of delay and more expense, yet not a dicky bird was mentioned about it by the Hon. Sir Joe in his contribution. That in itself is very telling indeed.

But on Tuesday afternoon we were subjected to two political bombshells. Yes, there were two, and they both came from the left of the party, from the true socialist side of the party. The one from Sir Joe Bossano who openly admitted – although now today they have issued a press release
2060 responding to the points made about the issue made by Mr Clinton, which I think is a bit odd given that we are still in the throes of this debate.

But the Government has issued a press release probably under the hand of Sir Joe Bossano, criticising the GSD view on this. He said that in effect they have massaged the figures by putting the money that Government-owned companies, instead of above the line, below the line, so then
2065 it looks like a surplus. Ah, because they did it ... You cannot really make this up. We could not believe our ears when he made that admission.

They keep on pursuing it by way of press release and calling us liars and calling Mr Clinton a liar and the Opposition. This is totally and utterly objectionable behaviour by the hon. Gentleman
opposite.

2070 Then the other bombshell came from the Hon. Che Guevara himself. I am referring to a historical figure.

Madam Speaker: We will refer to the hon. Members by name and not by a description, which you would prefer, because it will keep matters much more proper.

2075

Hon. D J Bossino: Madam Speaker, the Hon. Mr Feetham – who I described as the Hon Che Guevara for the reasons that I have just stated – said that he is clearly, and we are seeing evidence of it in advance of the Budget, on a mission to raise tax. He said so clearly, that is his philosophy and he referred to individuals in his address.

2080 But he let one cat out of the bag when from a sedentary position, Mr Clinton suggested, ‘Well, why don’t you impose high taxes on big earners?’ He said, ‘Yes, I will.’ The Hon. the Minister for Finance’s face turned white when he said that. He turned white. He could not believe the admission which had been made by Mr Feetham that actually there is an intention to tax big earners, whatever that may mean. *(Interjection)*

2085 And on the issue of Government contracts, which I want to dwell on, this is also another area of – sorry, Mr Feetham, relax, you are off the hook for now. On the issue of Government contracts this is another area of the way that the hon. Gentlemen do their politics and their governance, where we are seeing – and our policy is totally different, as we have expressed in our manifesto for the last election and the one before, which is that they are, in effect, given patrimony of the
2090 Government, assets of the Government to private companies.

I have made that point – and now Mr Origo has responsibility for Heritage – in relation to Knightsfield Holdings Ltd, which we have raised in the past in this House and which we will continue to raise because in the Budget Book this company is expected to receive £1.372 million for the year and extra from last year, £52,000. Yet, when the Hon. the Minister for Environment
2095 and Heritage is questioned in respect of Parson’s Lodge – which was the subject of some rudimentary, quite frankly, refurbishment, not enough – and he announced it just before the election as the result of the pressure that we were putting, he simply responds by saying that this is a private company and he cannot disclose any details. And, as long as they do not spend more money than what they are given he is not interested. What a way of governing your affairs.

2100 To boot, this is a company which has custody over many properties and tourist sites, which are simply not open, some of them, and not properly managed. The Moorish Castle is the subject of decay and has been for many years, and yet they are receiving £1.372 million this year.

2105 Why isn’t the activity of this company – which is draining public funds, and we are seeing no benefit as a result of that – the subject of a rescission of the contracts and the ending of the contract? We have a similar situation which I raised in the course of a Question & Answer session

recently on Wildlife Gibraltar Ltd, which also has certain contracts to run certain assets, particularly the Alameda Gardens.

2110 This company is earmarked to receive £1.25 million this year of public funds, *our* money, taxpayers' money. Yet, when the Hon. the Minister responsible is asked for details about the company, which is then the beneficiary of a subcontract from Wildlife Gibraltar Ltd, which is to be running the open-air theatre at the Alameda, 'I cannot answer the question, it is nothing to do with me. My relationship as Government is with the company, Wildlife Gibraltar Ltd.'

2115 This company is running the open-air theatre. This is wrong. This has to end and the public need to know whether this company, or this example is running its affairs properly. Is it providing value for money? Why should we not know what it receives? Should it receive anything from Wildlife Gibraltar Ltd, or is it running a profitable business? But why was it given to that company? These are things which ought to be open.

2120 They will say, in anticipation, that the arrangements with Wildlife were entered into under our watch, which is true. But that would be a completely self-serving and fundamentally weak point because we are not arguing against contracts. What we say is that there is a need to move on and open them up. The public needs to know if we are to be truly open and transparent. These are public assets.

2125 Moving on to Mr Cortes. The hon. Gentleman clearly lives in a world of his own. Everything he does is great. When we raise issues about North Front Cemetery, which is overgrown with shrubbery, 'It is going to happen'. He then talks about in that context, it would now have an air of serenity, North Front Cemetery. He has been in office for 12 years, and it is shameful the way that cemetery is currently in terms again of its current state.

2130 Basic things which I appreciate are municipal in nature, but they do affect people: overhanging bushes on pavements, again, 'Not as far as I know'. Nothing to do with him. Pedestrians, he says in his speech, will continue to be given priority. What a joke. When some of them have to walk on the road because they cannot use the pavement.

2135 In relation to Line Wall Road, again when asked, I mean, the irony, I asked him about this – I cannot remember what day it was last week – and that there were issues of traffic in Line Wall Road. And the next day he said it was fine we have got cameras there. The next day there was a serious accident! Again, nothing to do with the hon. Member.

2140 On the Nature Reserve we have serious concerns about what we are sensing is the creeping privatisation of that huge asset, right bang in the centre of the Rock and so important to our tourist offering. With the World War II Tunnels Project, which was already the subject of refurbishment before the elections, now has been given to a private company. We ask about this, no answers from the hon. Gentleman.

And then in relation to ticket sales, also that is further privatisation. And at the end of the day, are there going to be loads of private companies running the Nature Reserve and we need to watch against that. Ah, he has already got closer to the hot seat, well done. (*Laughter*)

2145 The Hon. Mr Cortes, in his usual wordy way, makes a virtue of really saying nothing. Let him be reminded that the dementia and health facilities were actually GSD projects. They were completed by them, and I am not saying I am willing to admit that they may have been improved by them but they were actually GSD projects, so please do not reinvent their history.

2150 Let me remind the hon. Gentleman, a bit of bragging on our side, that we have also done many projects ourselves just to mention a few: King's Bastion Leisure Centre, although that does not exist. That did not happen under our watch. Chatham Counterguard: Orange Bastion and Calpe Barracks, for example. Those things were done under our watch. (*Interjection*) I will get on to the Airport shortly.

2155 His vision, in stark contrast, the Hon. Mr Cortes's vision, is limited in effect to eight new concrete slabs at Camp Bay. That is what we heard the other day and some ratings. A true visionary indeed. Then he has the gall to say that we had no vision. Yet, the hon. Gentleman had been relying on the Development Plan of 2009, which we introduced in Government. They have not moved to introduce the next one until now, which is now going to be *further* delayed.

2160 This should have been done and dusted by 2019 before the COVID pandemic hit. Everything should have been in place. They are the ones who are relying, in effect, on our vision as far as planning is concerned. There is no other logical reason to it.

2165 But I am not in any way surprised, coming from the hon. Gentleman – this is Mr Cortes – by his hubristic statement the other day when he gave his speech, where he talked about – I think it is a really weird word – he talked about the only ‘political assemblage. This is presumably the hon. Gentlemen and Ladies opposite, who would listen and has a clear vision on matters of heritage.

Where on earth does he get that from? Has the hon. Gentleman not read the opinion piece that was issued in the *Chronicle* by the Heritage Trust where they said, and I quote:

The reality on the ground is that although there is undoubtedly a lot of positive activity around tourism

so credit to the Hon. Mr Santos:

and ad hoc projects coming to fruition, there is no momentum and unifying vision that is drawing on all these efforts in together to underpin and consolidate potential gains.

2170 There is no underlying vision. That is what the Heritage Trust are saying. In Education also, it is incredible, the hon. Gentleman incredibly attributes at one point – I thought he was going to make a non-political statement where we could all bask in the glory of success that we as a people have enjoyed in terms of – which I think is true what I am saying, not just by way of example – in terms of our Education offering over the last 30, 40 years.

2175 But, no, he made a partisan and party-political statement saying in effect that they were wholly and singly, as a Government, responsible for the advances as a Gibraltarian population in education. A wholly aggressive party political stance and not very generous at all.

2180 As far as the Hon. Mr Feetham is concerned, he quoted Clement Attlee. I am very fond of Clement, I have read his book, we had a private chat about it, I think he has read it. It is a very interesting book, and he did a lot of good. But I am going to quote Margaret Thatcher. It is a very short quote, but I think applies – (*Interjection*) and they fit the bill. And it is this, and I think he can predict what I am about to say:

The problem with socialism is that you eventually run out of other people’s money.

Which is what is happening to the hon. Gentleman opposite.

Then he says a rather bizarre statement as well. They need to check their brains when they jot these things down. When he says that our political interest, i.e. the GSD, is not to look after the working class. How can he say that?

2185 So, when he was with us, we were looking after the working class. But since he left, we are not. Is that the position? (*Interjection*) Is that the position, you know?

2190 Come on, I think we need to be a bit more rigorous in the way that we express ourselves, which is something (*Interjection*) – I am sure you will – that the Hon. Mrs Vasquez also needs to do. She needs to be much more vigorous. It was very obvious, I made allusion to some of the things that she was doing, that she was seeking to pitch herself again as part of a leadership campaign against the Hon. the Leader of the Opposition, almost like doing a reply from that position.

2195 But she made *cheap* references, and I think rather shallow references, about the Hon. the Leader of the Opposition when he was Minister for Health in, I do not know, the dinosaur years. The first Administration, I think it was, of the GSD between 1996 and 2000. Trying clearly to slur mud at Mr Azopardi, blaming him for overspend. (*Interjection*)

2200 But that was not the point that the Hon. Mr Azopardi was making in response to the Hon. the Chief Minister. What he is saying and has said earlier this week, and he said at the last occasion that we had to debate last year’s Appropriation Bill, is that they are not being honest with the estimations as far as expenditure is concerned in order to massage the figures, in order to ensure that there is a surplus.

That was the basic point that the Hon. Mr Azopardi was saying. So what the hon. Lady was saying is not to the point at all, has got nothing to do with it. In that sense, with the greatest of respect to her, she has also failed.

2205 Her attacks on Mr Clinton were, quite frankly, also non-points. Non-points, which do not really merit a response. *(Interjection)* She kept on saying in her speech in relation to her various departmental responsibilities that there is a lot more to be done. She is right, that is always going to be the case, but she cannot forget, as I said before, that there is a history.

2210 That party has been in office now for 12, we say, very long and tiring years. She has to defend that record. She cannot come new to the job and say, 'I'm now here', as the Hon. Ms Orfila was saying during the course of a television debate. No, no, they throw things that the GSD did when we were not even in office. When I make that statement, I make it apply across the board.

2215 Although Mr Azopardi was a Minister for two terms, he then was not a Minister for the following two terms. They make that charge against us. So they cannot pretend that everything: draw a line and when Mrs Vasquez was sworn in as a Minister, that is a new approach. That is not going to work and we are going to make sure it is not going to work. And I am going to be reminding them of their record, and it is a record should *she* become the leader, that she is going to be reminded of day in, day out by us.

2220 We are still seeking a response. Where is that mysterious £10 million? Where is it? We have written to the hon. Member, we tried to elicit that information from her, I think on her suggestion that we write to her, and the Hon. the Leader of the Opposition wrote to her, whizzed the email across immediately in this Chamber, it was in May, 21st May, and we still did not have an answer. We thought that the answer was going to come during the course of an intervention, but she made absolutely no reference to it.

2225 So, I would ask the Hon. the Chief Minister to make a note of that point and give us full and frank disclosure of where that £10 million settlement figure, that was paid recently comes from, because we are still certainly not in the Book and therefore we are not alighted as to where that is coming from.

2230 On her announced initiative on the mental health facility relocation, the Heritage Trust – we raise a bit of an eyebrow as well on our side. The Heritage Trust has already raised the alarm. I think they issued a statement yesterday evening, referring to a lack of, and I quote, 'Any heritage consultations or assessments'.

2235 Where are the reports that Mr Cortes is so very fond of? Where is the vision that Mr Cortes is so very fond to refer to continuously when he his talking about his area of responsibility? What are the results of the many meetings that Mr Cortes attends, when they cannot get a basic thing right?

2240 I would ask the Hon. the Chief Minister, although I do not have much hope, to advise who the benefactor is, because the hon. Government is at the receiving end of lots of monies from benefactors. Who is this benefactor? What is in it for them? Or is it just complete and utter charity? Maybe. *(Interjection)*

Mr Santos, at the beginning of his contribution, said this:

Everyone has the right to lead true and authentic lives free from the fear of hostile or violent reactions from those around them.

We cannot disagree with what he says. He is absolutely right when he says that. *(Interjections)* But I think that the hon. Gentleman is going to agree with what I am about to say. I know he is sceptical, but he is going to agree. There has to be respect for all views.

2245 I am sure that he is aware and has read a lot of material on this, that there is a culture out there which people who have genuinely held beliefs, whatever they are, so long as it respects human rights, as the Hon. Chief Minister said, respects in effect, the law and is intrinsically respectful, you may have an opposing view on a certain issue or another.

2250 As Democrats, I think we can all agree that those views ought to also be respected and not to be – I am not suggesting that he is responsible for that in any way or anybody around in this Chamber, that we do not create in Gibraltar, and we need to be wary of what is happening elsewhere. In effect, cancel culture, where people’s businesses or people’s political positions or success, whatever, is affected negatively as a result of holding a view which may be contrary to another view.

2255 As he suggested to me and advised me that I should leave it there, I intend to, but I hope that he agrees with what I have just said.

2260 But I think that Mr Origo’s contribution in relation to that raised other issues in terms of the high suicide rates in the trans community, I think he said. So those things are things which ought to be debated and looked at more seriously, not simply the Pride march, the flags, the month and all the rest of it. There has to be a deeper analysis on how this permeates through the Education system and how we need to protect growing children and all the rest of it: and with respect and with a certain attitude, I think we can reach a place where there can be consensus; and Gibraltar, in that sense, should be a shining light.

2265 But I need to correct him as far as one factual error is concerned. I was not here in this Chamber, but in relation to the same-sex Marriage Bill, as I understand it, it was passed unanimously on 27th October 2016, i.e. with the support of this side of the House. It was a unanimous position that was adopted by this Parliament. (*Interjection*)

2270 The hon. Member makes a reference to the Air Terminal. He refers to the Air Terminal in glowing terms. I mean, wow. I know he has not been around, but I cannot ... The best word to use is W-O-W, because as he knows that was the subject of intense political debate and division, I think, led by the Hon. the Deputy Chief Minister, and indeed the Chief Minister before their 2011 success.

Now to hear Mr Santos talk about the terminal in those terms, and I need to quote him, he says:

We are privileged to have this facility within our small grounds, which plays an indispensable role in our economy. Our Air Terminal is a gateway, not just to destinations but to possibilities.

(*Interjections*) Surely, he is referring to the current Air Terminal. I will repeat it:

Our Air Terminal is a gateway, not just to destinations but to possibilities.

2275 – and that we are privileged to have it.

This is fantastic, and I am really grateful that the hon. Gentlemen opposite have undergone this *Damascene* conversion in relation to this wonderful GSD project. (**A Member:** Hear, hear.)

Now, there were three things he failed to mention, as far as I recall. One is he talks about the campaign in the UK and the marketing logo, and I would say: where is *Fitur* in all of this?

2280 Where our friends in *La Linea* have a stall in *Fitur*. I would ask him to consider what I think is Government policy, which is not to attend *Fitur*, which is the sales fair in Madrid, given that the vast number of visitors that we have coming from Spain.

2285 He also, as the Minister for Justice, failed to mention – sorry, for Culture – the 1,000-seater theatre. Blank. No mention. Very surprised by that. (*Interjections*) But maybe the hon. Gentleman, the Chief Minister... I am just simply very surprised that the hon. Gentleman did not make a reference to it.

2290 Then he did not make any – if he made a reference, I think it may have been fleeting to the Future Job Strategy. He knows that that is a question I asked him at the time. No mention made. A flagship policy when they walked in, no mention made now by the Minister for Employment, and he talks about other initiatives, which may or may not be very good, so he only he made a reference to a few of them.

But no mention. So has there been an abandonment of this policy, which was much criticised by the GSD, indeed when Mr Feetham on that side was also a Member?

2295 As I said, he has launched a marketing campaign in the UK but he needs to grab the bull by the horns and deal with the issues that I referred to in my contribution earlier, of Knightsfield Holdings Ltd. And also, if I can ask him, to spruce up those entry points.

2300 The land frontier is in a *really* bad way and it is an embarrassment that this is the way that we should be welcoming our visitors. But not only that entry point, also at the Port and indeed the coach park at the midtown. So the description which he gave Gibraltar as ‘The jewel of the Mediterranean’ can be aptly applied.

2305 Moving on to the Minister for Housing. With the greatest of respect to her, and I am fond of her, I do not think she taught me, I think there was one art lesson and that is all. Although she is well-intentioned and well-meaning, I do not think that she has started on a good footing. We know that the hon. Member has wanted to be a candidate for that party over the last three or four elections but failed to get selected. So, it is probably because Mr Picardo did not want her.

2310 Maybe that is why she has decided to support the candidate, contrary to the candidate that Mr Picardo is fond of and is supportive. Well, that is typical of the hon. Gentleman. The hon. Gentleman is now hugging the Minister for Housing, but she needs to be careful about those kisses and those hugs, because they can be the kiss of death. (*Interjections*)

2315 But what is she doing? She is leading on the Ministry of Housing but has no charge over one of the central flagship policies, which is the construction in rather nebulous, unclear terms of public housing. They have been the subject of – I do not say criticism, but certainly of questions which have been raised by Action for Housing and questions by me on this side of the House, and they have failed to answer.

2320 They are under a manifesto promise – which they are very fond of saying that those things are cast iron, and they will be complied with – when they are not. And there is a history to that, they do *not* comply with all the manifesto promises. And they say that they are going to build additional general rental stock in housing or that the balance of rental homes will need to be increased. But these questions are always answered by the Chief Minister and not by her, who has direct political, departmental responsibility for this. Even then, we are simply treated to non-answers by the hon. Gentleman.

2325 Then the other flagship policy is a rent-to-repair scheme. She nods her head in eagerness. She is on a hiding to nothing. It is very clear that she has dedicated a very short element of her speech to it. It is very clear she is realising that what may have seemed attractive from a distance – something that was going to get people out of the housing list because they would pay for the repairs of the housing – that is not going to work because the fundamental point, which I hope she is realising now when she is speaking to all these officials and she is telling everybody she is having all these meetings all the rest of it, and we *still* do not have a formulated and published scheme – is that there is a huge cost in relation to infrastructure and clearing, which cannot conceivably be borne by the potential tenant who is on the housing waiting list.

2330 If it can, quite frankly, it is our policy, it is not theirs. He or she should not be on the housing waiting list in the first place. But she is not going anywhere with that, precisely because of these prohibitive expenses, in essence, and I will remind *her* –

2335 **Madam Speaker:** Hon. Member, please. The Hon. Minister.

Hon. D J Bossino: I will remind the Hon. Minister of her electoral promise, which very quickly slipped from her hands. It may have been a slip of the tongue because I think she tried to correct herself, on a GBC interview recently when she was questioning its viability. That is what she said.

2340 And Madam Speaker, on Road to the Lines, which is highly connected with this particular project, we have gone from what seemed to be an interesting proposal when it was under the charge and guidance and leadership of the Deputy Chief Minister, it was then shifted to the Ministry for Housing. And this is not a question of a month or two, as it is for the rent and repair scheme when we saw all the photographs in the *Chronicle*.

2345 Now, in effect, it has gone to Sir Joe Bossano as a clearing operation, in respect of which I have not received any answers because when I asked him who was doing the works, he said, 'Oh, it is not the Works. The Works do not include clearing'. I said, 'Who is doing it?' He would not answer. 'Which company is doing it?' He would not answer.

2350 So I need to file a Question at the next available opportunity. But he was not willing to answer. It has basically become a clearing operation. Again, where is that going? Another dog's dinner of a project.

2355 Before I move on, I need to share with her and Members opposite, the rather bizarre experience I had with her – and I would ask her not to do it again, but she can do whatever she wants – when I debated issues of housing on GBC, when she hardly allowed me to speak. I have been doing this for 30 years in Gibraltar and Spain and elsewhere, and I have never been treated to that type of behaviour.

2360 The Hon. the Minister for Health, I think, refers to Mrs Sanchez delving into Sálvame politics. If what she did at GBC was not Sálvame, I do not know what was. (*Interjections*) I would ask – oh, she says good. Well, no, but then the hon. Gentlemen think that they are introducing a different type of politics and the type of politics that we do is attack, attack and attack. Come on. She needs to change.

Then she talks about –

2365 **Madam Speaker:** I am sorry to interrupt you again but could we refer to Members opposite as 'the Honourable'? I know the hon. Member is getting carried away but it is important. I have not interrupted you until now.

2370 **Hon. D J Bossino:** So the reference to third person 'she' is not acceptable? I am not getting carried away, I am just simply –

Madam Speaker: Well, let's use the word 'animated' then, if the hon. Member prefers.

2375 Pronouns are perfectly permissible. Do not start a sentence with 'she'. Start with 'the hon. Member' out of respect, both sides, and then you can proceed to use the pronoun in the follow-up sentence after the comma.

Hon. D J Bossino: Yes, of course, Madam Speaker, it is a bit of a challenge. I think it may be better off simply referring to the hon. Member on all occasions. I will remember when the sentence starts off.

2380 But the hon. Member referred to the Housing Act and it is about to be published, and she makes ... let me remind her of the GBC debates when she was there and I was shocked. Almost hot on the heels after an election and she looks at the representatives of the landlords, 'Oh, you are the representative of the landlord, okay, yes, we will meet.'

2385 That should have happened before the election like we did, and they should have had proposals. It was like new to the hon. Member. It was like new to the hon Member and she makes no reference in the context of the Housing Act to the issue. How is she going to deal with the serious issue which the private landlords are facing?

2390 All she says is that it is going to come up with a fairer outcome. Then she dismisses – and maybe the hon. Member is not aware of the history of this – the delays of Hassan Centenary, Bob Peliza, and Chatham, where we have shown press release after press release – and I know we will never agree on this. She refers to the delays being caused by COVID. *We* have said on more than one occasion that the chronology suggests otherwise. That promises were made in the previous elections in relation to these projects such that COVID should have had no or very little impact. (*Interjection*) And that, furthermore, the construction sector was one of the few sectors which were not impacted by COVID and were given a reprieve in terms of continuing activity during the lockdown period.

2395

2400 Then she says that it is a fact that in Gibraltar all young people – I mean what a sweeping and incorrect statement, and she needs to consider that and withdraw it. Young people are entitled and will get a flat. That is not true! Housing is one of the biggest issues, social issues, that we are approached on as an Opposition. Because there are many young people who feel disenfranchised from a house. That is fine. I am not criticising them for whatever reason, because the finances were not there, all the rest of it, but let's have a proper debate. She cannot then say that everything is hunky-dory. It is not. She is going to end up in the same parallel universe that Mr Cortes lives, and that is not good for her.

2405 So, the Hon. Mr Bruzon, out of courtesy to all the Members of the House, I would simply say this in relation to his contribution. That is that he rightly says – absolutely rightly says – that entering the political arena does have an effect on our families and all the rest of it.

2410 I go back to the first point, you will recall, that I made, which is precisely because of that we should make life as easy as reasonably possible, because at the end of the day this is a vocational job that we do. We all do it here because we want to serve the public and the community, but there are basic manners and etiquette which, if discharged by the Leader of the House, would go a long way to assuage the sharper elements of having a family member involved in politics, as he rightly mentioned.

To that degree, I would agree with the statement that he had made but I would extrapolate from that the linkage that I make in relation to the initial point that I made.

2415 So, Madam Speaker, finally, as I said when I started this is a weak – I was going to say wicked – Government riddled with internecine divisions. It is on its last breaths and I will certainly not be voting in favour of the Bill.

2420 **Madam Speaker:** All right. Would the mover of the Bill like to reply?

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, very much so, because we have now had the opportunity to hear the contributions of all Members of the House. This debate is a hugely important debate. It is the debate where we are looking at the Appropriation and the Appropriation is what is going to enable us to run Government for the next year.

2425 This afternoon we have heard the Leader of the Opposition – sorry, we have heard the putative Leader of the Opposition reply to every single one of the Government speeches. Usually a Leader of the Opposition replies to the speech of the Chief Minister or in London to the speech of a Prime Minister. I suppose it is the sweeper that replies to other Government speeches.

2430 So today, having heard the speech from the sweeper, the hon. Member has ensured that we have a good view from the Government benches of how they have seen the contributions of hon. Members on this side of the House.

2435 Usually, Madam Speaker, that is not the case. We hear contributions from hon. Members in each of their areas of departmental responsibility and then I deal with issues on behalf of the Government in respect of all of the criticism that has been put of the Bill. This has been a little bit different in terms of the way that the Opposition have decided to represent their views. They have wanted to have a sweeper for them to deal with the issues that we have presented. I think that has been very useful.

2440 I thank the Hon. Mr Bossino, first of all, because he has set the tone. He has set what can best be described as an intemperate 'toys-out-of-the-pram' tone, which belies an obvious bitterness, I think is the word that the Leader of the Opposition used – but obviously it is the mote in their own eye that they are talking about – an obvious bitterness that, by whatever the margin, we won the general election. An obvious bitterness that despite all the things, as the hon. Gentleman has just said to the Minister for Housing, despite all the things that they did, which they believe should be done before the general election, they did not win the general election.

2445 Despite all of the advice that we have seen from the hon. Gentleman to all of the putative leadership candidates that he has decided to identify on this side of the House, based on anything he may have been told on his walk down from the House every morning, avoiding those green

2450 parts of Gibraltar that he tells us we have to prune, the hon. Gentleman knows – because he has suffered countless repeated defeats – that he, of course, would be the worst person to take advice from in the context of either a leadership election or a general election. (*Interjection*) Well, it is as relevant, Madam Speaker, as the person who gave the advice made it.

Madam Speaker, it cannot be relevant in this debate to talk about the leadership elections in the GSLP, which are not even on foot, but not to reply to the hon. Gentleman who has made the point.

2455 So, Madam Speaker, in responding to the hon. Gentleman and to all of the contributions that we have had from the various hon. Ladies and Gentlemen on the other side, I am going to reflect overnight on exactly how much detail to go into, in dealing with the points that have been made, which do not relate to the appropriation. This debate should not be where the hon. Gentleman has taken it. This debate should be on the Appropriation and on what is going to happen next in
2460 respect of the public finances of Gibraltar.

A State of the Nation debate, of course, deals with other areas of policy. It does not have to deal with issues which are esoteric. But the hon. Gentleman has made them relevant.

Adjournment

Chief Minister: (Hon. F R Picardo): So, Madam Speaker, with that, I would now propose that the House should adjourn until tomorrow morning at the hour of 11 o'clock when I shall deal with
2465 all of the contributions that I have heard from hon. Members, including hon. Members on this side of the House.

Some of what hon. Members said on this side of the House, I think, has been a salutary demonstration of the incredibly hard work that is put in by Government Ministers day in, day out; and some of what we have heard on the other side is a salutary demonstration of the fact that
2470 opposition politics sometimes can be as simple as coming here and then verbally throwing one's toys out of the pram.

So I move, Madam Speaker, that the House should now adjourn to tomorrow at 11 a.m.

Madam Speaker: I now propose the question, which is that this House should adjourn to
2475 tomorrow morning at 11 a.m. I now put the question, which is that this House should adjourn to 11 o'clock tomorrow morning. Those in favour? (**Members: Aye.**) Those against? Passed.

This House will now adjourn to 11 a.m. tomorrow morning.

The House adjourned at 7.30 p.m.