



PROCEEDINGS OF THE GIBRALTAR PARLIAMENT

MORNING SESSION: 11.01 a.m. – 1.33 p.m.

Gibraltar, Wednesday, 24th June 2015

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The Gibraltar Parliament

The Parliament met at 11.01 a.m.

[MR SPEAKER: Hon. A J Canepa GMH OBE *in the Chair*]

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

Order of the Day

GOVERNMENT BILLS

Appropriation Bill 2015 – For Second Reading – Debate continued

Mr Speaker: The Hon. Sir Peter Caruana.

Hon. Sir P R Caruana: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

5 With Mr Speaker's indulgence, if my hopefully brief address sounds like a political swan song then that is because, of course, because it is.

I am delighted to see that the practice that I started, of announcing here how many Budget speeches I had done, appears to have caught on and it has been adopted more widely, which I think is good because it allows *Hansard* to record people's trajectory through this Parliament. This is my 25th and last Budget debate.

10 I recall, Mr Speaker, your predecessor immediately after the by-election in 1991, in which I was first elected, then Sir Robert Peliza had a bit of a dilemma because the result of the by-election was on the last night that he could give me the 30 days' required notice of the Budget Book before the scheduled Budget debate which was to be my first. And he chased me round John Mackintosh Hall with this Budget Book in hand to make sure that he delivered it to me before midnight and that I could not forget. Of course I would happily – then not as bold as I was to become – have waived any technical requirement in that regard. But the 1991 Budget immediately after the by-election was my first.

15 Mr Speaker, during these 25 years – most of them spent as Chief Minister, but eight or nine of them in the no less worthy role of Opposition Member of this great institution – I have of course seen much change and my principal political rival, except in the latter years, the current Chief Minister was of course Joe Bossano. Joe was, I have to say, a formidable political opponent. Formidable but always engaging and I am glad he is not in this House yet today to hear that, because I suspect he is not one taken for being eulogised and probably would enjoy them even less coming from me.

25 But nevertheless I think it is appropriate to mark at the end of my 25-year parliamentary career that for many of those years I have had opposite me not just a formidable partisan political rival, but also a rival who himself contributed much to the Gibraltar that we all enjoy today and whose own political career will, when it concludes, I think, stand amongst the great ones in Gibraltar's politics.

He and I of course, agreed on some things, we disagreed on many and I hope and suspect that we may have agreed on more than either of us are willing to publicly admit.

30 Of course the great ideological rivalry, apart from his supposed socialist agenda and my supposed – in our respective political jargonism – right wing political agenda... the great divide in domestic economic terms was Joe's, I suspect, still held 'rainy day fund' mentality when it comes to economic stewardship versus our approach at the time which was that Gibraltar needed to spend, to grow, to reposition, to create an environment, to create a climate, a fiscal as well as a reputational environment, in which further investment would become more attractive to foreign investors and that way start a snowball rolling which
35 only Government funding at that time could really do in sufficient measure.

One thing that Joe Bossano once said whilst I was still an Opposition Member of this House before my tenure as Chief Minister began, has always stuck in my mind during all the years that I was Chief Minister and, indeed, I sought to adopt as a mantra and that is when he said that there is no political security without economic self-sufficiency. In other words, that this community, challenged and threatened as it is politically, could not without independent economic security safeguard its political security and as I say, I adopted this mantra because it struck me as absolutely right.

Whilst immodestly claiming a proportionate share of whatever credit might be due, together with all the other social and economic stakeholders and partners in this community, that must equally share how Gibraltar has succeeded as a community during the 25 years that I have been a first-hand witness of its progress through my 25 years in this House.

I do not wish to bore the House with economic statistics and I will try to mention none, but in those 25 years, the economy has grown from around a couple of a hundred million to the levels that the Hon. the Chief Minister announced earlier this week. That is a nearly six-fold increase in the size of our small economy. Employment has much, much more than doubled; there are many more than twice as many people in economic activity in this community than there were 25 years ago. There has been a huge increase therefore, not just in the number of jobs but in the quality of jobs, and the earnings and take-home pay of our citizens.

There has been a huge reduction in the tax burdens suffered by our citizens and there has been a massive real increase in Government revenue. All of that, in turn, has enabled equally massive forward strides in the services that this community enjoys. The services that people often do not include but should include, because they are the principle ingredients of the definition of standard of living and quality of life which is not just measured in the amount of money that you can dispose of as a family through your pay packet, but also the quality of the health service that you enjoy, the quality of the education that we enjoy as a community, the caring services and the other public services, all of which have seen leap and bound forward strides in the last 25 years.

Indeed, I suspect that many of the youngest members of our community simply have no knowledge or understanding of just where Gibraltar came from in respect of what we now take for granted in the general description of social wellbeing. There have been massive forward strides in housing availability, both public and private; in, as I say, disposable incomes; in the renewal we have been able to renew our major public amenities and institutions – our prison, our hospitals, our air terminal, our court houses, our sports and leisure facilities, public housing; we have been able to engage in transformational urban renewal and beautification.

So there is no doubt that in the last 25 years – and I would say a little bit more... I keep on saying 25 years because that is what my first-hand political witness is, but of course I do not wish to minimise and I will recognise in just a moment, the indispensable contribution made by those that came before us in achieving whatever it is that this community has been able to achieve subsequently.

So a huge improvement in the quality of life and in the standard of living of all Gibraltarians, but more importantly or perhaps most importantly beyond that, it has delivered economic security and, with it, the greater political security that was the other half of the mantra that I mentioned at the beginning of my address.

In short, this community has proved adept at caring for the infamous metaphoric political pear tree and we have known how to, not just to ensure that the pear does not fall, metaphorically, from the tree, but that the pear has grown and that we have been able to benefit from it. And that is a measure not just of the correctness of the mantra, but the skill and success with which successive generations of political leadership in Gibraltar has been able to put the mantra in effect, into effect.

So, gone are the days on the back of our economic security; gone are the days of our political forefathers having to go cup in hand with requests for development aid to the UK with political conditions attached. And not for the first time, I will recognise in this House just how much harder it was for – if I could just call it loosely – pre-1988 Governments in Gibraltar; short of money, as they always were, to govern Gibraltar and to advance the social and economic prospects of this community with a much smaller, much less prosperous economy and therefore much more constrained availability of funding for the Government.

Their job in keeping Gibraltar politically safe as well as economically prosperous was therefore all the more difficult and we owe a debt of gratitude to those who laid the ground that we were then able to cultivate and see grow the rich economic social and political harvest that we have since been able to harvest from the ground that they laid.

So, gone are the days when the MOD sat on our most valuable land resources. So too, gone are the days of bilateralism between the UK and Spain. Now we have, instead, the double lock, when the UK will not only not give away our sovereignty without our wishes – the famous preamble to the Constitution – but will not even negotiate or discuss our sovereignty without our freely expressed consent. And although I recognise that it was my predecessor in office, Joe Bossano who effectively broke, psychologically, the mould of – not subservient because I do not think any of his predecessors were subservient – but the

100 previous mould of political and governance relationship between Gibraltar and the UK, it was the new
Constitution of 2006 that definitively reduced to print, the degree of self-Government and autonomy that
this community had, in a sense, helped itself to, through bold political actions and courage before that date
in making good the equally democratic and necessary mantra that Gibraltar is best governed by
Gibraltarians for Gibraltarians.

105 And so the new Constitution, and so the double lock, and so the end to bilateralism, and so the fact that
nobody nowadays seriously contemplates the realistic prospect that it is possible – not just undesirable, that
it is not even possible – for the UK and Spain to contemplate hatching a deal affecting our future status and
our future rights, behind the backs and over the heads of the people of Gibraltar. That degree of political
security which has been won gradually over 25 and more years is itself the result of our growing economic
independence and the economic security that comes with it.

110 Therefore I do not think that the correctness of the mantra, economic security is necessary – not just
because it is desirable to give the people of Gibraltar a good standard of living, but also because it is the
necessary ingredient for our political security... I do not think on the basis of the evidence of the last 25 and
more years, I do not think that anybody can possibly doubt that that is the correct and successful mantra that
should underpin the conduct of politics and governance in Gibraltar.

115 So if I could now stop looking backwards and turn my swan song-ish gaze forward a little. Given what I
have just said about the correctness of the mantra, it is my view that this community cannot take for
granted, we cannot assume, that economically good times will always be with us. We have had a very long
and good run of good economic times and there is a danger that we all get – rather like a generation that has
never seen a slump in property prices, you know we can all get – lulled into a sense of false security that
economic hard times can never hit Gibraltar, that we have got the magic formula, that whatever happens
120 anywhere else things will always be rosy in our gardens and nothing will ever appear on the horizon to
challenge our standard of living and to challenge everything that we enjoy today.

Well, as many countries have discovered in the last five or six years, this is simply not true and it is
simply not a safe assumption upon which to ensure that our future generations of Gibraltarians enjoy the
good fortune that we, this generation of Gibraltarian, are undoubtedly enjoying.

125 I am not talking about mistakes that any Gibraltar Government might make – and of course all Gibraltar
Governments will make mistakes. That is not what I am referring to; I am referring to local factors out of
the Government's control, global and regional factors out of the Government's control and events out of the
Government's control. Any of them could at any time deliver a change of prospect compared to the good
one that we enjoy today.

130 Now that I hope that after 25 years of the modernisation, of the rebuilding, of the repositioning of
Gibraltar; now that I hope that as a political class, we – or more likely you, because I will not be part of it
for very much longer – can agree that perhaps that rebuilding and that renewal of Gibraltar is substantially
complete. There are still things left to be done, but there is a limit even to the amount of housing, for
example, which is historically our acute problem; there is even a limit to the amount of home-ownership
135 housing that this community, given its limited size, can absorb. There are, I acknowledge, pending things
left to do.

There is the urban waste water treatment plant, there is power generation and distribution, there is, I
hope, the tunnel still to do and there are things to do of a major kind; and it will always be the wish of
Gibraltar Governments to invest part of the fruit of our economic success in further improvement of the
140 modernisation of Gibraltar and its amenities and the personal prospects for individual economies, of
families within our society. But I think it must surely be true that we must now be much closer to the end of
that journey than even to the middle of it, let alone to the beginning of it.

145 That said, we need to consider, we need to have a... I do not know how these things happen – with great
difficulty in the pressure of modern politics, I suspect – but this community needs, for its own good, in my
modest opinion, to find a way where it can, over a period of time, somehow rebase or recalibrate or refocus
our approach to the business of Government, to the business of politics away from really what we have had
for the last 20 or more years where you know we compete with each other to see who offers more, who
offers better, to spend more, to cut taxes more, to do this more, to do that more, because this is the perfect
ratchet, this will end in tears if it is not at some point, interrupted collectively.

150 Of course, I am not pointing the finger at this Government or at this Opposition, because we have all
engaged in it, we have all indulged in it. I am not saying that this is a lesson for anybody in particular. I am
speaking of what I would like to see if I look forward five, 10, years from now, what would have changed
for the good of that economic security which we all agree is important for our political security, might have
happened. And we need to find... and I do not under estimate for the reasons of a sigh, sedentary comments
155 and consequent sniggers; precisely for those reasons, I do not under estimate the difficulty of finding it. But
I think it will be a huge legacy that the new generation of political leadership in Gibraltar will leave.
Perhaps more valuable and more lasting than anything tangible that they achieve, if they are able to work

together to deliver that change in the way in which we conduct politics, that recalibration and that re-basement.

160 So, going round full circle to the very beginning of my address and my reference to the great sort of culture, the great sort of clash of ideas – Joe Bossano’s rainy day fund versus Caruana’s spend and spend to grow approach – has the time now come, has the day now come, has the moment now come, to focus more on the rainy day fund attitude? My view, I am not saying this is something that has got to be done overnight. I mean I would be shocked and slightly disappointed if at the next General Election sort of both
165 manifestos promised to do absolutely nothing that cost any money – unlikely and surprising! So this is a process that has got to take place and the process, if it is to have any meaningful chance of success, has to start with a conversation about how the process would be carried out and perhaps some external non-political but local intervention or assistance might assist.

170 So should we be putting money aside in a sort of sovereign wealth fund or reserve to cushion us from such bad times or less good times, as may become Gibraltar in the future, so that we can protect, guarantee our economic security and through it protect and guarantee our political security? I think the answer is yes and if I should ever succumb to the temptation of which there is presently no evidence whatsoever, of writing some sort of book and I ever answered the self-posed question of what sort of things do you regret not having done or not having done better during the 16 years, or 15 and a bit years, that I had the
175 stewardship of this community, somewhere in that list there would be that I did not start creating a sovereign wealth fund sooner.

180 We did little bits of things. You know, the investment in Gib House was, I suppose, some sort but I am not talking along that scale, I am talking about putting to one side a significant proportion of our surpluses and our wealth and investing it in assets so that over a period of time we are not buffer-less should leaner fiscal times not afflict the Government, its revenues and the economy at large. So, as I say, this would almost certainly require this sort of change of chip and I would dearly like and hope to see it materialise at some point in my lifetime.

185 And if I could just move on in this sort of rather self-indulgent or indulgent review, what else would Gibraltar benefit from advancing in now that we have made the economic, the social and the political progress that, through the hard work of successive generations and successive political parties and successive Governments and successive economic stakeholders and social stakeholders... have already achieved.

190 We need, I think, to move on to the next agenda of change and modernisation. So when – I am not saying... it may not be now – but when we all agree that we have finished re-modernising, and rebuilding, refurbishing, and beautifying, and providing parks, and yacht marinas, and housing, and new court houses and new air terminals, when we have finished all that, what is the next level that will take Gibraltar that next qualitative step in our collective journey towards a prosperous modern European member of the family of nations that fall into that description?

195 There are one or two things that I am going to touch on. Well, you know it is not that long ago that this place was an Assembly and you know in the new Constitution we managed to get it recognised as a Parliament; and there is a difference between a Parliament and an Assembly. An Assembly simply, theoretically exists for the purposes of passing laws, whereas a Parliament has got a much wider role in the governance, the affairs of a country, beyond the simple role of passing laws.

200 Whilst recognising the improvements introduced by the hon. Members opposite to the way that this House works since they arrived in office, I do not think that that can be the end of that agenda in terms of the wider, deeper, new agenda of further modernisation, not just of the way that this Parliament works but of the quality of democracy in Gibraltar.

205 By which I mean, how do we make the way democracy works in Gibraltar more like the way democracy works in larger, more modern, developed European countries and less like what we have been all these years – an Assembly snatching for powers from the administering power, if I can call it that, fighting for self-Government powers and not focusing on the things that other countries have been focusing on because it was premature for us to do so because the focus was on just acquiring the right to govern ourselves without focusing on how we would govern ourselves when we got the powers to do it? That is what I think is, interestingly perhaps, the focus of the agenda for the future.

210 I think high on that list has to be a discussion, a consideration, by those who will do the brainstorming that is the next generation of political leaders in Gibraltar sitting on both sides of this House, but not including me, an independent transparency mechanism. And in talking about an independent transparency mechanism, I am not treading on the debate about whether, if things had been done through the company, had been done through the Government, public debt would then be too high or too low. I am not talking
215 about quantum; I am talking about the machinery of transparency – whether you are in Government or whether he is in Government or whoever is in Government in 30 years’ time.

Because, you see, transparency cannot depend... We tend to debate transparency as it affects us across the floor of this House, but most European countries have moved on, as the hon. Members have in part

220 recognised, by freedom of information legislation. Transparency nowadays is not just between politicians; citizens are entitled to be the beneficiaries of transparency as well and they do not have the right to come into this House to ask astute or less astute or more astute or better informed or less well informed questions.

225 So transparency cannot depend on asking parliamentary questions or on deciphering or making deductions from the answers, or even understanding the answers. Transparency has got to be if we want to look like other countries, it has got to be systemic and it has got to be automatic and the information has just got to be there for those who understand it, to see it, for those who do not understand it perhaps to abuse it but at least there, visible without the need to scrimp and scrounge and ask, beg and debate and do all manner of things, in order to try to get to it.

230 And remember, Mr Speaker, that I am describing the position as I would like it to be in the future. We have governed under the system, such as it is, as well. Of course we have a different view – as the hon. Members know in the context of the current debate – we have a different view about the extent to which that system is being used now, compared to the sort of things that we did, but that is not the debate that I am addressing at this time.

235 So in a sense, Mr Speaker, every time the Hon. the Chief Minister accuses the Leader of the Opposition or whoever, of not understanding what he is being told, that the information is there, in a sense – I mean this may be an acid test of the correctness or not of what I am saying – in a sense, every time he gets the opportunity to say that to a political opponent, there is an element of recognition that the necessary degree of automatic availability of the information is absent.

240 Because in saying, ‘You have not asked the right question,’ there is an admission there that you had to ask a question, for example, that you had to deduce, that you had to make deductions, as opposed to fiscal matters. And by fiscal matters, I have to say, Mr Speaker that I understand... I do not claim any particular authority for this statement but in my personal opinion, transparency of public finances should and must include the handling by the Government of all monies that it handles, whether it be in Government-owned companies, as we used to do as well, or whether it be in the thing that we are technically debating at this time, which is the Consolidated Fund of the Improvement and Development Fund – in other words, any economic resource about which those that are elected into political office have dispositive powers over, should be the subject of whatever modern automatic transparency mechanism is in place and that is, I do not think, is the case today.

250 This gives me the opportunity which I do not wish to miss in this, my last address to this House, to applaud my friend, the Leader of the Opposition, Danny Feetham, for the brave, honest and persistent way in which he has done the Opposition’s difficult job of addressing these complex questions that do not always strike a chord with citizens as they go about their day to day work. But who in this House can honestly say that they would have been surprised if a Leader of the Opposition, doing his job, as we in a non-partisan sense would expect a Leader of the Opposition to do, if the Leader of the Opposition had *not* addressed this debate in the name of transparency?

255 And then people can have different views, people can agree or disagree. I think the House well knows the view that we take on this side of the House of that position. I think that Danny is a worthy, able and hard-working successor of mine in the leadership of the Party and I sincerely hope that all those people who are otherwise minded to vote for the GSD at the forthcoming General Election, will place their trust in him, because he deserves it.

260 So question also whether in this list of possible new architecture for the future, we might also have for example, an independent Budget responsibility mechanism, as they now have in the United Kingdom, whether perhaps... and this is something that I considered in my time and decided against, but it is something worth reconsidering from time to time – whether an international credit rating which necessarily imposes a degree of external oversight through a market assessment mechanism. It has its risks, but it has its democratic advantages too.

270 So, Mr Speaker, the next generation of leaders will have to debate these things and take Gibraltar forward in those and whatever other elements they think should be included in Gibraltar’s new agenda items for the future, as their predecessors have done in relation to the economic and political security of Gibraltar. My view is the goal should be what does this community need to do in terms of its system of governance to bring Gibraltar closer to the way other European democracies do democracy? And I do not mean that we vote for a Government and I do not mean all the improvements that they have introduced over the last four years, in the frequency of meetings, I do not underestimate or mischaracterise the value of those improvements and I recognise them as improvements but I think that the agenda has much further to go.

275 Mr Speaker, I cannot end without making a brief reference to external affairs. To reduce the propositions to the briefest and simplest, in my view and having sat in the chair there for 15 and a half years, and been pulled and pushed and considered this and rejected that and considered the other and put everything into the decision-making pot at different times, you know after a 15-and-a-half-year learning curve, effectively, I am firmly of the view that if there is to be any architecture – which I thoroughly

280 recommend that there should be – for ongoing dialogue between involving both Gibraltar and Spain, then
the trilateral – or some version of it which respects the essential ingredients of the trilateral process – is the
only way forward.

I do not say that the precise architecture of what we call the trilateral process is the only viable method,
but any method that replaces it, if one is to replace it, has got to respect the essential ingredients of that
285 omelette because that is where our political security lies. And of course – and this is I suppose a general
reflection to another Joe Bossano mantra – there can and must never be a return to bilateralism in Gibraltar,
because that necessarily amounts to a denial of our rights as a people and the moment that we sign up to a
denial of our rights as a people, then as sure as night follows day, there will be a disrespecting of those
rights by others.

290 And in respect of the Cordoba Agreements, which can be differentiated from the trilateral process – the
Cordoba Agreement was simply the first supposed fruits of the trilateral process... Insofar as the Cordoba
Agreements are concerned, we have, at not inconsiderable cost to us as a small community, honoured our
side of the bargain and Spain must do the same. And the consequences of Spain not doing the same are not
just that the fruits of the Cordoba Agreement are denied to the people on both sides such as the fruits were
295 for one side or the other or for both, it is the fact – and this is, in a sense the most worrying aspect of it –
that if Spain does not honour the Cordoba Agreement, then I do not see how any Gibraltar Government in
the future can be asked, or expected to, or can safely itself decide to, trust agreements of a political kind
with Spain in the future.

And the EU must itself take care that it does not aid and abet Spain's resilement from compliance with
the Cordoba Agreement such that it, the EU, is not itself contributing to making the political relationship
between the three parties in relation to Gibraltar more complex. I am, of course, referring to the Cordoba
Airport Agreement which, by the way, was notified to the EU institutions, was notified to all the Member
States and not only does Spain have a moral, political – if not a legal, because it was not a sort of Treaty
obligation – to honour that, but the EU who accepted notification of the arrangements, and accepted
305 changes of language in EU aviation measures in consequence of those changes notified by the UK and by
Spain, cannot adopt a position of neutrality.

Neutrality means that you adopt a position that does not favour or oppose one side or another to a
dispute. Neutrality neither requires nor justifies that you aid and abet somebody in resiling from an
agreement which they have made which one of the sides has implemented and which has been notified to
310 you. The word 'neutrality' in that respect is much abused in my view by European community spokesmen.

So I applaud the hon. Members opposite's insistence in holding the UK to those agreements and,
frankly, it would be in my opinion a shocking betrayal by the United Kingdom of Gibraltar if they ever
struck any form of compromise agreement in relation to the Airport non-implementation that had the effect
of excluding, suspending or making in any other shape, manner or form, exceptional, Gibraltar's right to, in
315 theory and in practice, immediately benefit from all EU aviation measures to which the Cordoba Agreement
would entitle it to do so. And I am sure the hon. Members will have the support of this side of the House for
the remainder of this Parliament, as I am sure whoever forms the next GSD Government will have it from
them in the next Parliament.

Finally, Mr Speaker, I would like to thank hon. Members on both sides of the House for, over so many
320 years, their friendship, their honesty and their respect, even as political adversaries. There have been many
tough, bitter, aggressive and angry moments – of course, none of them contributed to by me! (*Laughter*) –
but consistently with, I think, our Gibraltarian instincts, I believe we, none of us, ever forgot that it was
only politics and that we never intended personal harm or hurt or offence to anybody, even though it would
not surprise me if it had often been caused. I, for myself, can certainly say that insofar as concerns me, that
325 statement is true.

I thank also my friends, the Leader of the Opposition, Danny Feetham and the Hon. Albert Isola, for
their very kind, warm and generous words about me during their interventions yesterday.

330 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Mr Speaker, would the hon. Gentleman –?

Hon. Sir P R Caruana: Sorry? Yes, of course.

335 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Mr Speaker, that may be a convenient moment – because I understand he is not
going to be here tomorrow when I reply – for me to say something which I intended to say in the course of
my reply tomorrow, but I wish him to be in the House to hear.

Given that he said he was going to speak for 10 minutes and has gone on for 40, there will be much
more that I need to reply to that he might not want to be around to hear, but if I could just pause our
disagreements for a moment and reflect with him here in the House, on his 25 years of service to the
community, which I think it is absolutely right to mark and I thank him for giving way to allow me to do
340 that.

In fact, Mr Speaker, when we started at 11 o'clock I was quite worried. This was the Budget debate, Peter Caruana was on his feet, I had six and he had seven and it all started to feel quite like when I was first elected in 2003. I am very pleased that my lot have now turned up and if it comes to a vote of confidence, I stand a better chance of winning it than I did when I first saw him across the floor of the House, formidable as he then was, as Leader of this House in November 2003.

Mr Speaker, he became a Queen's Counsel in 1998, two years after becoming Chief Minister – an honour which it was right to bestow on him because of the work he had done before he became Chief Minister as a Barrister and in recognition of his skills as an advocate, which he then deployed for 16 years on behalf of one client in particular, Gibraltar Plc.

And we have had many disagreements at the time that he has been in politics, not just between him and me but of course between the Party that he represented and the Party I now represent, because it is in the nature of our adversarial system of politics that we highlight the things on which we disagree. And if, on every day we disagree about one thing and agree on 99 others, nobody looks at those 99 others; it is in the nature of our system that we apply the magnifying glass to that one area of disagreement. And of course there are many things on which we agree and we are only in this place usually concentrating on the things that we disagree.

Therefore, Mr Speaker, having become Chief Minister, when I was notified that he was going to be invested as KCMG I was very happy and proud for all of the people of Gibraltar that Her Majesty was going to recognise the service of a Gibraltarian to his community in that way, especially given the fact that 16 years in the job that he was doing, and I have done only for three, requires a level of dedication and commitment of time and of being able to withstand the pressures that others would put in our community principally expressed on the person sitting in the Chair I now sit, that that was in fact a very worthy recognition indeed of the work that he had done.

Mr Speaker, I always worry when Peter Caruana is on his feet in this place and I am nodding to what he is saying. And there were instances during the course of what he has said when I found myself nodding. Happily, I found myself shaking my head and whispering to the Deputy Chief Minister about the gall of the man to say some things, but I think he would be delighted to hear that; because I think, like Joe Bossano and like Margaret Thatcher, if you spend 20 years in front line politics and you do not divide opinion, you have not really achieved anything at all. I think Margaret Thatcher would have been delighted to see that there were strikes on the day of her funeral and that Peter would be delighted to hear that the Deputy Chief Minister and I thought that he just... we could not believe how he was thinking he was getting away with some of the things he was saying this morning.

I want to thank him, Mr Speaker, for recognising also the contribution of Joe Bossano in the way that he generously has today. The time will come when we have to pay tribute to Joe Bossano, but not today. But it is right that in his last intervention during the course of this Appropriation Debate, he has wanted to do so, and he has done so in generous terms and I am grateful for that on behalf of Members on this side of the House.

Mr Speaker, Peter Caruana is everything but an easy adversary. He is probably the toughest adversary I will ever face and therefore he was a good trainer for somebody who has got to go up against adversaries internationally, against Gibraltar. And defeating him on 9th December 2011 was, therefore, I put to him, a massive personal achievement for all of us on this side of the House, and I say that to laud him and to compliment him in saying it, because he was a giant as Chief Minister and difficult to see how we might debunk him.

Mr Speaker, in the 16 years that he has been here, I am not going to hide the fact that we had huge disagreements, certainly in the time I was here and the time that Joe Bossano was leading this Party before them. But, as I said on the morning of the election, in the 16 years that he was here he did not do everything wrong, he did much which was right and which we recognise, but of course our system, as I said, did not allow us to concentrate on those issues.

I do not think he is the greatest Gibraltarian of all time or the greatest Gibraltarian of our time and I do not think he thinks that either, Mr Speaker, and would be embarrassed in somebody pretending to claim that for him, but his remarkable election record, Mr Speaker demonstrates the regard in which this community held him for a very long time.

I must tell him I have absolutely no desire to emulate his record in that respect, but the respect of the people of Gibraltar in political terms, is expressed at election time with votes in numbers and who they put on this side of the House and they have demonstrated their regard for him in that way and as politicians, I know he and I understand as do all the rest of us sitting in this House, that that is the greatest compliment that a community could have paid him.

Mr Speaker, I want to pay tribute to others who are not in this House this morning and that is to his family because all of us in this House will know that those who have sat in the chair in which I now sit, in particular, the sacrifice, the time that one has to give up and that one's family has to give up, and the sacrifice and the intrusion that one's family has to put up with because one is in politics. They have had him

back now for some time and will have even more time from him now that he is not going to offer himself for re-election. His family has grown, he is now a grandfather and I am sure that those pursuits will be much more enjoyable even than putting a wretched young barrister against the ropes in this place, as he used to relish doing all those years ago.

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These days, Mr Speaker, he is generous in his advice and generous with his time whenever a current Chief Minister has to request that a previous Chief Minister recall why certain things happened in a particular way or why certain letters were written in a particular way, and he is always available on the end of a phone when I need to speak to him and I am extremely grateful on behalf of the Government and on behalf of the whole of the community that he is available for that purpose.

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All of us, Mr Speaker, in each of our ministerial posts build on the work of those who have come before and in the same way as the first hand over of power in 1972, from the AACR to the IWBP, and then again to the AACR and from then to the GSLP and then to the GSD and back, all of us are building on the work that each of us has done and I am building on 16 years of work done by him and I want to thank him on behalf of all the community for that.

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He has been very clear previously, having relinquished the post of Leader of the Opposition that his interest, like the interest of most Gibraltarians, if not all Gibraltarians, is simply to see Gibraltar continue to succeed and that is exactly what we are embarked upon. He has expressed that in a way I think people see is genuine; he has avoided the cut and thrust of the partisan fray since he left the post and went to the backbenchers; he has introduced the concept of a backbencher – something that he used to be against when he was in Government but there he is on the back benches, speaking in a non-partisan way.

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And I hope that he has had enough of the partisan fray, quite unlike others, Mr Speaker, I wish him all the best in any endeavour he may decide to pursue, even politics, as long as it is not on the other side of me. But I can think of few people who might better represent different international organisations than Sir Peter Caruana QC if some international organisation were to decide that they would benefit from his representation and he would of course enjoy the support of the Government in every respect in that way.

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Mr Speaker, his political career is not over yet; this is only the Budget debate and there is still sometime to go before an election and I do not want to write him off, but given that he has written himself off, if I may just end by saying that, you know, giants are people who can crush you and people you might disagree with but they are still very big and he is a giant of Gibraltar politics! (*Banging on desks*)

430

Hon. Sir P R Caruana: Well, Mr Speaker, I think that is an extraordinarily generous set of remarks and I am extraordinarily grateful to the hon. Member for his generosity of spirit in objectively and fairly recognising what he may think I may have achieved and contributed in the past. I think it demonstrates that in-built somewhere into the DNA of our adversarial political system is the ability of people to differentiate between political hostility and personal hostility, and when push comes to shove I think as human beings we all know which of the two is more important.

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I have to say, Mr Speaker, that when I relegated myself to the back bench I had not fully understood that I would be then thereafter liberally referred to as ‘the backbencher’ (*Laughter*) in official parliamentary debate but nevertheless...

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Mr Speaker, in conclusion, I am not a person given to an excess of demonstration of emotions, but I have been hugely privileged and honoured by the people of Gibraltar and by my Party and by my parliamentary colleagues, to serve as their leader for many years, and I wish to thank them, my colleagues in the Party, my colleagues in Government and above all the people of Gibraltar that entrusted me with their most valuable thing – their future and the future of their children for so many years.

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Of course, I have not succeeded in everything that I have tried and there are many things that I have done which no doubt I could have done better. I would be satisfied with the judgement that, on balance, I gave of my best and I left nothing in the inkwell, so to speak, of my own effort in trying, as best as I saw it, to advance the interests of this community.

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I have to say I shall miss this place! Nor had I calculated that there was a huge amount of time left until the next General Election, so I will enjoy it whilst it lasts. Still, we must be down to months by now. And I suspect, my Lord, that I shall miss this place more than, judging by even the generous comments of my learned friend, some of the Members of it will miss me. But still, that is life.

I wish all future Governments of Gibraltar, whatever their political colour, Godspeed and every possible success in their continuing steerage of this fantastic country, of this fantastic people, and fantastic and worthy people, through our collective journey; and, as we sometimes forget, against odds that are stacked up against us by much larger and much more powerful countries and organisations.

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I will always be available to assist all Gibraltar Governments in any way that I can in pursuit of those interests of this great community that gives us all such a happy, high standard of living and quality of life to enjoy with our families.

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

465 **Mr Speaker:** With the leave of the House, when the Hon. Sir Peter Caruana first sat in the House, he was occupying the seat which the Hon. Edwin Reyes is now occupying and I was occupying the seat which the Hon. Danny Feetham occupies. We were sitting fairly close and we are still sitting fairly close, (*Laughter*) if in different capacities.

Is this the end of the road? Well, strange things happen in politics, in public life – only time will tell!

470 **A Member:** I should hope so.

Hon. Sir P R Caruana: My wife may be listening. [*Laughter*]. [*Banging on Desks*].

Mr Speaker: The Hon. Samantha Sacramento.

475 **Minister for Tourism, Housing, Equality and Social Services (Hon. Miss S J Sacramento):** Mr Speaker, it is quite amazing how time flies. This has been my first Parliament and this will be my last Budget address of this Parliament, making it important to pause for a moment and reflect on all that has been achieved for our community by this Government in our first term in office.

480 Of all the Departments that I am responsible for, nowhere is the change as apparent or as rewarding, in my view, as the tremendous progress that has been made in Social Services in such a short period of time.

We have gone, Mr Speaker, from a haphazard disjointed service, that by the very nature of its disorganisation failed to support and reach out to people as it should, to one that is now a far cry from that.

The priority has been to reorganise and restructure in a way that has best worked for the service and the service continues a process of self-assessment and review, as needs and priorities change.

485 To say that in the history of Social Services it is the first time ever that there is a full complement of staff is an achievement in itself, (**A Member:** Hear, hear.) but this Government has not stopped there and we have invested in increasing the number of social workers and support staff. Following restructures, investment in staff, resources and tools means that social workers are now able to discharge their professional duties and are no longer put in a position where they have to work with their hands tied behind their backs, and can now go further and have the capacity to develop strategic policies.

490 Historically, Mr Speaker, one of the problems was in the recruitment of social workers because traditionally this is not a profession that has been very popular locally. We have tackled this head on and in the short term we have teamed up with a specialised recruitment agency in the UK to ensure that the recruitment process is quick and effective, and we have a steady supply of social workers in the short term, and through working with the Department of Education we are engaging with the comprehensive schools and the College to raise awareness in training in this as a profession.

495 In order to properly support social work graduates, once they return, Mr Speaker, so that they are properly trained and with the right amount of support and experience, two years ago we introduced four additional posts for newly-qualified social workers where they undertake rotations throughout the service benefitting from the experience of their colleagues.

500 Since the reshuffle, Mr Speaker, the Care Agency exclusively deals with Social Services and no longer Elderly Residential Services. This was the final piece in the jigsaw, Mr Speaker, to enable the organisation to fully focus on social services for the community and work more cohesively at senior management level, and I will deal with the individual teams in turn. The exemplary team at Social Services provide a better service year on year now, Mr Speaker.

It is important to note at this stage, Mr Speaker, that during this term of office, we have increased the complement of social workers by four, introduced four new posts for newly-qualified social work graduates, two social worker assistants and more administrative support. With this investment we have been able to take Social Services to a whole new level.

510 The Children and Family Services, Mr Speaker, is made up of a number of different services providing for children and their families in need.

Early intervention is essential so as to ensure that children do not need placements outside their family homes and, Mr Speaker, we are now, I am delighted to report, at a stage where we can provide that.

515 Although safeguarding and child protection is what usually gets into the public arena, it is the work that is invested in the early stages that ensures that families move on from crises and resolve their difficulties. So investment into early intervention work, Mr Speaker, is the right thing to do and which is what we are now doing, because it helps avoid family breakdown, criminality, domestic abuse and substance misuse, among other issues.

520 As part of the restructure of Social Services, Mr Speaker, we have introduced a duty team to deal with the initial referrals of the service and they have now been able to develop databases in the last three years to gather information on the referrals that they receive. This will assist in highlighting trends in society and, as a consequence, identify where the needs lie.

In fact, Mr Speaker, as an anecdote, I have this morning received an e-mail from the head of the service informing me of a complimentary remark from another Government Department on how well the duty team is working and how they very actively and pro-actively follow up on referrals. It is another example of how and why the service works well, and we work at a multi-disciplinary and multi-agency level in a cohesive way, Mr Speaker – something that was never done before.

We are now at a stage where we have developed a database for domestic abuse. This service is to highlight families where it is a common occurrence and intervention is required. It also helps us identify families where the difficulty has begun to arise and support is offered so the couples can resolve their issues without this impacting on their children.

In fact, Mr Speaker, recently two social workers and the Agency's psychologist attended a training programme in the UK so as to deal with victims and perpetrators of domestic abuse. The work carried out under this programme is usually incorporated in a child protection plan because it is no longer good enough to safeguard and protect victims and their children.

We recognise that perpetrators continue to act out in a behaviour that they have learnt, and punishment itself is not the only solution. These perpetrators will continue to act out their behaviours and they continue to be parents, so they must be assisted in making the necessary changes and break the cycle.

Mr Speaker, the long-term team will deal with child protection, adoption and fostering, court welfare, children with disabilities and children in need. I am delighted to report that, thanks to the investment in increasing the number of staff, the social workers in the court welfare team no longer have a delay in preparing court reports – a problem that was endemic for many years before we took office.

We have introduced a respite service for children with disabilities and this fulfils one of our manifesto commitments.

The statutory Child Protection Committee continues to meet and it ensures that safeguarding training is offered to all those who work with children. The most significant development in child protection is the commissioning of a comprehensive child protection policy for Gibraltar, which will truly be a landmark document and policy. This has been a two-year project led by Social Services, but involves all Government Departments and key stakeholders and is now in the final stages.

The purpose of the Adult Services in Social Services is to assist vulnerable people aged 18 or over to live as independently as possible in the community. They have eight separate areas of responsibility, which include, in addition to the general social work: domiciliary care, safeguarding adults, day-care services for people over 60, out-of-hours emergency social work, overseas placements for adults with learning disabilities and the transition stage for looked after children who leave care, and they also sit on the multi-agency public protection and risk management of sex offenders.

We have had significant achievements this year. Our one point of contact referral system is now firmly in place and is being used by the different professionals wishing to ensure social work services for a range of potential users. There are clear pathways to the system in place to ensure fair and transparent access to the different services.

The Gibraltar Multi-agency Safeguarding Adults at Risk of Abuse procedures – and I am the Chairman of that Committee, Mr Speaker – has been very successful, with the number of referrals being received from other professionals continuing to increase over the past year. This is due to the increase in awareness around safeguarding, as a result of a rolling programme of multi-agency training in basic awareness; and 174 people have undertaken this training this year. The Housing Department is now also represented on that Committee, Mr Speaker.

A Gibraltar Public Protection Panel has been set down to ensure the effective communication and a joint approach to the monitoring of people who could pose a threat to the general public, Mr Speaker. The head of the service has been assigned the role of safeguarding officer and the senior social worker is the data controller for the Agency under those procedures.

The number of people coming under these procedures, Mr Speaker, has more than doubled in the past year. In addition, Mr Speaker, the team sits on the multi-agency Domestic Violence Working Group, which I established and is drafting procedures within their different professional areas so that they work effectively in partnership to reduce the risk of domestic violence and work with survivors and their families.

But of all the achievements, Mr Speaker, I think that there are three main achievements during this term that are so significant that, while they have not taken place during this financial year, I think they are important and I need to mention them.

First of all is the establishment of a brand new purpose-built day centre for the elderly at Waterport Terraces. This consolidates the service that used to be provided at different locations and this means that now not only can people meet in more pleasant and comfortable surroundings which are completely accessible, but by having large premises we can open up the service to more people.

Then, Mr Speaker, there has been the establishment of a focus on dementia and Social Services is a key player in that, alongside colleagues in the GHA. A multi-agency Dementia Working Party was convened by this Government, Mr Speaker, to draft a dementia strategy for Gibraltar and support dementia services.

585 Finally, Mr Speaker, and one of the things that I can be most proud of, is this Government's unprecedented investment in domiciliary care which has seen the biggest injection of recurrent expenditure in the Agency. The GSD's budget for this service when they were in office was £600,000. Ours has increased it to £2.5 million, so imagine how many more people have received home help, (*Banging on desks*) and this does not only help them, Mr Speaker, but their families also benefit from this service.

590 Mr Speaker, it is an important way of caring for our community and it helps more of our elderly citizens remain safely and independently at home. To make sure that this service runs effectively and efficiently, we are constantly reviewing the administration of it. We recently invested in a new database system to control the domiciliary care service better. A senior social worker is dedicated to overseeing the service and the team regularly attend ward and bed management meetings at hospital as well, when this is necessary.

595 Turning to Disability Services, Mr Speaker – and before I start, I wanted to say that the Dr Giraldi Inquiry was necessary; the Inquiry showed that there was abuse, but we need to move on from that, and we have.

Mr Speaker, the Service comprises of St Bernadette's day centre for adults with learning disabilities, Dr Giraldi Home and the service in the community.

600 The Service today, Mr Speaker, is nothing like the Service from a few years ago and it has come on in leaps and bounds. I make it a point to visit the services regularly and meet with the service users and their families, and I am incredibly proud of all that we have achieved. The unprecedented strategic approach in the recruitment of staff and the intense training, both internal and external, has clearly made all the difference.

605 The way that we work at the Services is different, Mr Speaker. There are now structured and meaningful activities. Many of these take place in the community. There are clear support plans for the individuals in order that we can maximise the benefit to service users. There are so many innovations that we have done in the Service that I would probably be here for about three hours just speaking on the differences that we have made there, Mr Speaker, but I will concentrate on the main points.

610 Importantly, we have extended the Service, Mr Speaker, particularly in relation to respite at Dr Giraldi to meet the growing needs in the community. There has been further refurbishment of the premises as well as investment in the equipment. We continue to work on raising awareness of people with learning disabilities all the time and our Service is about making people matter, and to give them an opportunity to showcase their abilities. The design of the Gibraltar Christmas stamp by service users at the St Bernadette's centre is a prime example of this.

615 Training throughout the Agency, Mr Speaker, has completely changed – and not as alluded to by Mr Netto yesterday, where he tried to convince people that we were using the same programme that they did when he was in office, Mr Speaker.

620 In answer to Parliament questions, I told him that I would not give him the programme because it was an internal Government document and that it was not appropriate for him to attempt to micromanage a service for which he is no longer the Minister. He had plenty of opportunity to do that when it was his responsibility. We do things our way and clearly the results show that it is a better way, Mr Speaker because the training we delivered is dedicated, it is needs-led and it is more focused than ever before; and, given that the Agency is now smaller, it is easier to deliver the focussed training.

625 But it must be recognised that the training team has provided intense training not only to numerous care workers and recruits in-house, but when we were responsible for Elderly Residential Services, to a lot of the people who are now based in Mount Alvernia and elsewhere. They have also teamed up with ETCL and have been running courses on elderly care for ETCL at Bleak House for almost two years – such is the interest of work by residents in this field, Mr Speaker.

630 The partnership with ETCL is a real success story and I am sure that the hon. Member who shadows responsibility for Employment will be happy to hear this. We have a very successful training programme for carers indeed and our endeavours have resulted in 69 of our current employees having commenced as ETCL trainees. Some of these are now in elderly residential services not necessarily within Social Services.

635 I just want to, as an anecdote, comment on an example because a couple of days ago with a member of staff who is one of the success stories of ETCL. She is a school leaver who was the first entrant into the Care Agency through the ETCL programme when we first started it in February 2012. She started with us training as ETCL. From that she progressed to a contract with the Care Agency and when I was chatting to her the other day she now tells me that she is going to embark on a course to qualify as a nurse.

640 So that shows, Mr Speaker, that our strategy is good, that our strategy works, that people are happy and people can now see career progression and aspire to that within the service. So that makes me very happy indeed, Mr Speaker.

It is quite significant, Mr Speaker, that yesterday, while Mr Netto spoke of everything under the sun for the past 20 years and he was extremely critical of equality issues, in particular disability policies, there was not a single mention or criticism of Social Services. This is very telling to me, because I see it as a rubber stamp by the Opposition on how well we have done. The legacy that the GSD left in Social Services was

645 shameful. Of all my portfolios, it is certainly the worst Department that I have come across, and when I say that, I refer that to the Government then... priorities and their lack of investment and support, and it is not a criticism in anyway of the professionals or individuals who work for the organisation.

I am glad that, with the hard work and sheer dedication of the teams who work with me, we have managed to turn the service around. The development in the service means that we have moved on from a reactive service to one that is able to strategically plan and also work in preventative measures.

650 Our unprecedented investment in Social Services, and particularly in training, is an investment in the future of the social work profession and, in turn, an investment in the betterment of our community.

655 Not enough recognition has been given to social work professionals in the past, Mr Speaker, but I can honestly say that the team of professionals who work at Social Services today, whether social workers, care workers, management or administrative support, make up an essential service in our society and should no longer continue to be unrecognised. They are a dedicated team of professionals who have my full support and I thank them and the management of the Care Agency for the difficult work that they do, and work that they do well.

660 Mr Speaker, I now turn to the Department of Equality. As I have said in previous Budget speeches, equality is at the heart of this Government and our commitment to equality shows a natural progression towards an inclusive society and it is a recognition of a modern Gibraltar. The Government has been progressing the equality agenda over this term, and it is an advancement of civic and human rights. It was indeed a proud moment for me to have been appointed as the first Minister for Equality.

665 I was immensely proud that the first Bill I moved in Parliament was the Civil Partnership Bill in 2014 – the fulfilment of a manifesto commitment. It is legislation that enabled the formal recognition of relationships between couples of the same sex – a momentous occasion in the history of our Parliament, Mr Speaker.

670 On 28th March this year, we celebrated the first anniversary of the commencement of that legislation. Introducing that legislation provides a further step on the road to a fair and inclusive society and the right to be treated equally in the eyes of the law. As we heard the Chief Minister inform us, Mr Speaker, there have already been 35 civil partnerships so far.

675 We are a Government that believes that the respect of a person's sexual orientation is a fundamental human right. Mr Speaker, this is a far cry from the denial of gay rights demonstrated by the GSD. While Mr Netto attempted to re-write history in his speech yesterday, the reality is that the GSD tried everything under the sun that they could to deny the advancement of gay rights.

680 Mr Speaker, they even went as far as resisting an application to a joint Government tenancy by a same sex couple in what, over the years, has been known as the 'gay housing case'. It was resisted all the way to the Privy Council, Gibraltar's highest Court of Appeal, at a cost to the taxpayer in excess of a quarter of a million pounds; insofar as the court proceedings for a constitutional declaration on the age of consent, and not a judicial review, as Mr Netto incorrectly referred to it yesterday. So concerned were the FCO on the issue that they even sent observers to participate in the case – quite embarrassing, I must say.

685 But then, Mr Speaker, by Mr Netto's own admission, the advances made by this Government on human rights are greater than those made by his Government, and while yesterday he tried his best to retract the statement that he made in the Newswatch interview on GBC on IDAHO day, at least he qualified and conceded yesterday that we had, insofar as gay rights.

690 Mr Speaker, a GSD administration would never have seen the rainbow flag fly above No.6 Convent Place. This Government has sent a clear message that gay people deserve recognition and respect, and provides a further step to a fair and inclusive society. I am proud to be part of this Government that was bold enough to send this unequivocal message and mark a milestone in the legislative process. (*Banging on desks*)

Mr Speaker, the Department of Equality is able to co-ordinate and oversee matters relating to disability in all other Government Departments and is involved in all Government projects.

695 It is the policy of this Government to ensure that all new projects going forward are fully accessible and my Department offers advice and guidance on this. For example, we were heavily involved in advising and assisting the Gibraltar Tourist Board at the time when I was not Minister with responsibility for it, on accessibility to beaches and tourist sites.

700 We have seen our beaches transformed into accessible places with improved walkways in beaches all year round. We have seen the refurbishment of the Camp Bay Pool, which has an accessible ramp being built; has colour contrast in the steps to assist those with visual impairments. We have seen the dramatic change at Eastern Beach and Catalan Bay which are accessible, and we have the accessible units and mobility aids to assist people with disabilities integrate into our way of life in the summer.

705 We also have the new Montagu bathing pavilion which, as part of our policy on inclusion, is fully accessible of course and has hoists in the pools and easy access into the sea and also has fully accessible changing places, shower facilities and an inclusive children's play park. This is a facility that can be enjoyed by all of the community.

In fact, Mr Speaker, wearing my Minister for Tourism hat, as a result of these improvements, Enable Holidays, a tour operator specialising in holidays that meet the requirements of people with disabilities, as an accessible holiday destination, recognised us as such. This is an achievement indeed for our initiatives.

710 Mr Speaker, access for all has been at the forefront of all our new refurbishments and our buildings are completely accessible, and you can see that at No. 6 Convent Place, the newly-opened Gibraltar International Bank. We heard from the Minister for Health yesterday how changes are being made to St Bernard's Hospital to make that inclusive. The new university will be accessible, as will the new schools at the old St Bernard's Hospital.

715 The Inces Hall is being refurbished to make it accessible and, Mr Speaker, this Parliament will be accessible as well. In July, we will also see the first ever purpose built facility for the Stay and Play programme opening its doors, thanks to Minister Linares, whose responsibility it is for sports.

One of the most significant aspects of work that we have taken so far – significant and substantial, Mr Speaker, because it has been a huge piece of work – is to review the current legislation and provide laws modelled on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Disabled. The draft legislation is now ready and we
720 are in the process of consulting all the relevant stakeholders. We will be in a position to publish this in the coming weeks.

The most fundamental change that the new legislation will bring is the statutory obligation to make premises accessible to people with disabilities. Consequently, the Department of Equality has been working very hard on a programme of auditing and advising Government Departments on the reforms. The changes
725 will also include public areas and not just buildings.

The Government Technical Services Department, in consultation with the Ministry of Equality & the GHA Occupational Therapy Department have been very busy identifying and making improvements in our community. Also, Mr Speaker, they have all undergone training on accessibility audits which was recognised by our Department.

730 Mr Speaker, I accept that our manifesto stated that we would do this in our first year and, of course with hindsight this was a bit ambitious of us, but the principle continues to be just as important and it has taken us a bit longer than we expected, partly because we did not envisage to find the problems that we did and also because it has been quite a complicated exercise and it is more important that we get it right than rush it through.

735 Furthermore, the principle is not just about the legislation itself, it is also about awareness, which is something that we have made immense progress on, and that is pivotal in order for the legislation to be embraced by our community.

Anyway, Mr Speaker, because the legislation is not on our statutory books does not mean that work on it has not been done. We all know that Gibraltar's physical landscape has changed and is changing and we
740 have embarked on transforming it into a place which is becoming accessible and we will continue with our schedule of works, Mr Speaker. And I am surprised that Mr Netto seems to not have seen all the things that we have done, Mr Speaker; perhaps he has not been in Gibraltar!

In line with that, Mr Speaker, is the disability action plan that we are formulating. Essentially, Mr Speaker, it is a strategic approach to disability issues which is what we now have through the Department of
745 Equality. While the plan is not yet published, many strategies have been developed and introduced already. It is obvious to all that a lot has been implemented and it is a piece of work that is being thoroughly researched. We must not forget, Mr Speaker, our legacy, in that we are starting from scratch in these matters because the GSD never laid any foundation in this respect.

750 Mr Speaker, we have come a long way in dealing with issues related to disabilities, both in relation to learning disabilities and physical disabilities, in this term of Parliament. It is, in fact, unprecedented.

The hon. Member opposite, Mr Netto, in his vicious diatribe of insults yesterday demonstrated that he is either blinded by a jealous rage on what we have achieved, when he achieved so little, or simply does not see what we have done, which everybody can see – even Enable Holidays has seen it. Does he not look
755 around to see everything that has been achieved, Mr Speaker, because everybody else can?

He made a song and dance of the disability action plan yesterday. He had the opportunity to do it in 16 years when he had the responsibility, but he failed to do so. He had since 2007 to implement the UN Convention, Mr Speaker, but did not do so either. In fact, he did nothing, Mr Speaker, so I just do not understand this attitude yesterday, but anyway, Mr Speaker, I will take no lessons from him in disability, in Social Services or in anything else, because I need to remind the hon. gentleman that this is not just about
760 ticking boxes and what we are doing is setting a responsible roadmap for the next five to 10 years, Mr Speaker, because honestly, Mr Speaker, I fail to understand how Mr Netto has the audacity to pontificate, as he did yesterday, when all these things were his area of responsibility – particularly in the last four years when he was in Government. At least Mrs Ellul-Hammond, when she was my shadow prior to becoming a back bencher, could distance herself from the GSD failings, because she was not a Minister at the time, but
765 Mr Netto was and it was his responsibility! So what is his excuse?

But anyway, Mr Speaker, I would rather concentrate on all the positive achievements that we have made in our term, because thankfully, Mr Speaker, it is our responsibility; we are in Government, they are not, so let's remind them that they are not and they might wish to have a bit of self-reflection and look at their own failings, Mr Speaker.

770 As my hon. friend, the Chief Minister, announced, support for our disabled has already been outstanding and we have yet another increase to disability benefits, increase to the blind person's allowance, 50% increase for rates for sponsored patients, significant increases to Income Tax allowances for our disabled, reductions in import duty on goods used by our disabled and elderly in our community.

775 Mr Speaker, I am not suggesting that everything that needs to be done has been done, but a lot has been done so far and this is clearly something that is a work in progress, and we are very proud of our achievements so far. We continue to work closely with related groups and societies, and that is one of the benefits of this Government's open door policy, Mr Speaker – that we invite, we consult and we listen.

780 Turning to gender equality, Mr Speaker, the Department also continues to develop policies and strategies in this regard. While we consider the new census to update the information that we have, when undertaking our analysis of gender issues in the workplace, so as to inform our work programmes and initiatives, to promote gender equality and address inequality where it exists.

We are particularly looking at educating and raising awareness with the youth, we are in discussions with the Department of Education to explore how to reach out to children of school age and we are also working with the senior section of the Girl Guides and we are working together on planning initiatives.

785 We are also working closely with the GFA on initiatives and organised courses on empowering women through sport. It was a pleasure to be invited to the girls' fun football development programme during one of its weekly sessions, which aims to encourage girls' participation in football from an early age with the message that football is just as much for girls as it is for boys.

790 Finally, on education and awareness, Mr Speaker, I am delighted to announce that I have been in discussions with the Vice Chancellor designate of the University of Gibraltar to explore collaboration with the Ministry for Equality, to progress the issue of gender equality awareness through the University.

795 While we raise awareness throughout the year, I make a public statement on gender equality on International Women's Day in March. My message is clear, Mr Speaker: that girls and women should be empowered to reach their full potential, but ultimately people should be appointed on merit and not on gender and not to fill any quota.

During my term, I have attended the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women at the UN Headquarters in New York twice. The Commission is instrumental in promoting gender equality and empowerment of women and the UN's focus is on priority areas that are fundamental to the equality of women and supports all aspects of the Commission's work.

800 I also form part of a steering committee of Commonwealth women parliamentarians. Through this forum, I hold regular meetings with like-minded colleagues and have been invited to speak at conferences of women parliamentarians that I have attended. This is an excellent forum to learn and share best practice.

805 In this capacity, Mr Speaker, in February I hosted the second British Islands and Mediterranean Region Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians Conference. The conference explored the role of parliamentarians in ending violence against women and girls. High level speakers, including the Attorney General of England and Wales, the Right Hon. Baroness Scotland, attended as speakers.

810 The conference – and I am sure that Mrs Ellul-Hammond, who was also invited, will agree – was a resounding success. Meeting fellow women parliamentarians was an invaluable opportunity to learn from best practice and take away some important insights on how we can most effectively work to eradicate violence against women and girls. Although strictly speaking a conference only for parliamentarians, local professionals were invited to the conference to speak, as well as to learn from shared experiences.

815 Significantly, for the first time in Gibraltar we have a strategic approach to domestic abuse. This has been a huge task. In order to first understand the extent and the impact of the problem of domestic abuse in Gibraltar, we have been undertaking research and gathering statistical data. This has not been easy and the exercise is not complete because, save for a few Departments, statistics on this subject have never been collated and we are now in the process of doing so. While we now have a better idea of the issue, it is not necessarily a completely accurate reflection and we therefore look at different ways of collecting this information in the future.

820 But for the first time, we have established a forum of all key Government Departments and agencies in relation to domestic abuse and we meet to discuss working practices in order to improve co-ordination between relevant Departments. The forum will meet at regular intervals and will also invite relevant stakeholders to work with them.

825 The Government recognises the exemplary work undertaken by the staff at Women In Need in helping victims of domestic abuse. In the past they had very little support other than the premises and an annual grant. We have invested a lot of time in working with them. They are actively supported by the Ministry for Equality who offer guidance in addition to practical support.

As well, Women In Need have developed a professional working relationship with Social Services. Consequently, there is now much better communication and co-operation between them, and Social Services, as a result, are able to deal with cases in an improved manner.

830 In November last year, together with the Director for Equality and the head of service from the Children and Families team at Social Services, we paid a familiarisation visit to the Welsh Assembly in Cardiff to see first-hand how the government in Wales was dealing with the issues of domestic abuse at a strategic level and, in particular, their policies and strategies in this area.

835 There is no place for domestic abuse in Gibraltar, Mr Speaker, and my Ministry, together with all the relevant Departments and agencies, is working to eliminate this in Gibraltar.

Mr Speaker, in respect of my housing portfolio, I would like to start by saying that in our first term in office we have constructed almost 1,000 affordable homes offered on a co-ownership basis, and just last week we have announced the construction of a further 1,700 homes. (*Banging on desks*)

840 More detail on this in a moment, Mr Speaker, but I just wanted to set the tone that this Government, under the helm of a GSLP/Liberal administration has done more for housing than the GSD ever did in 16 years. This, of course, is not the only thing that we have done to improve housing, but it is so fundamental that I needed to start on that note. The progress that we are making on housing is literally visible on all fronts, whether in the construction of new homes or the refurbishment of existing housing estates.

845 Low cost and affordable housing is one of our flagship manifesto commitments. The new estates at Mons Calpe Mews and Beach View Terraces will be ready very shortly, indeed, Mr Speaker, to the delight of many. This will provide 331 and 568 flats, respectively.

850 All the construction will, of course, have an effect on the housing waiting lists, but we are well aware of the demand for home ownership and we have not stopped at just the development of the three estates in our term in office, which is why we have continued to work on this front with the construction of a further 1,700 homes at Hassan Centenary Terraces and Bob Peliza Mews, so that we do not have a repetition of the housing crisis that was allowed to develop by the GSD who, by their own admission, did not make housing a priority.

855 In terms of co-ownership flats, Mr Speaker, the GSD only ever built 804 flats during their long tenure. We had Waterport Terraces, Cumberland, Bayview and Nelson's and we had a further 600 flats at Mid Harbours Estate. So, unfortunately, that has created the problems which we have inherited today; and going back to the construction of those flats by the GSD, those who live in Nelson's, Bayview and Cumberland unfortunately know all too well that they continue to suffer from the construction defects of those estates and those defects this Government has had to invest in rectifying.

860 It is also important to mention, Mr Speaker, that within the current construction projects, there is purposely-built accommodation for the elderly. In last year's Budget speech by my friend, the Minister for Housing at the time, Minister Balban, he announced the construction of Charles Bruzon House and Sea Master Lodge flats, and only a year later you can see how advanced the works are and they are expected to be completed by the summer of 2016.

865 That will give us a total of 141 new flats for the elderly and will also result in 141 flats being returned to Housing rental stock, having yet another effect on the housing waiting list. Much care has been taken not to repeat the mistakes made by the GSD and we have consulted relevant professionals in the design of the flats, making them user-friendly and accessible; and avoid the inherent costs of rectifying the design defects of Bishop Canilla and Albert Risso, and let's not even mention the fiasco of the elderly flats at the old St Bernard's Hospital which were so unfit for purpose, Mr Speaker, that they were rejected by everybody they were offered to.

Mr Speaker, when we took office there was a waiting list of 63 bath-to-shower conversions in Government rental stock. This means that there were 63 elderly or disabled people who were struggling at home and this, Mr Speaker, was in the days when hardly anybody received domiciliary care.

875 This is the importance that the GSD gave to the safety and wellbeing of the elderly and the disabled at home, because despite the waiting list and the earliest request for a conversion sought dating back to 2001, in 2011 they converted seven bathrooms and in 2010 – wait for it Mr Speaker – it was the grand total of four conversions! They fared better the year after, Mr Speaker, because they did five!

880 So whereas in three years the GSD undertook a total of 16 shower conversions, I am proud to say, Mr Speaker, that since we took office and made this a priority, we have in three years undertaken a total of 367 (**Several Members:** Hear, hear.) (*Banging on desks*) bath-to-shower conversions. (*Interjection*) Well, everything matters, Mr Speaker – whether it is a shower, whether it is domiciliary care, whether it is accessible places. Everything matters to the people who do not have it, Mr Speaker, and we are a Government who cares! We actually care about people, Mr Speaker.

885 Actually, after having to endure the swansong by Mr Netto yesterday, let's remind ourselves who was the Minister for Housing at the time.

A Member: He was the evil –

Hon. Miss S J Sacramento: He was one of them.

890 **A Member:** He was the evil twin –

Hon. Miss S J Sacramento: Yes, Mr Speaker, Mr Netto, who is the one who professes to be the saint or the saviour of the disabled – the person who was preaching from the pulpit yesterday, Mr Speaker, – oops, maybe he forgot that he did not help them either!

895 Another important commitment, Mr Speaker, is the refurbishment of the Government rental estates, and true to our word, in our first term in office the transformation of the largest housing estates is evident for all to see. We have tackled the forgotten estates, which were so neglected by the GSD in favour of luxury developments.

900 We now have made (*Interjection*) considerable... Well, Mr Speaker, certainly the people who live in the forgotten estates seem to think so, even though those from the GSD who remain present in the Chamber may not agree, which is why they are referred to as ‘the forgotten estates’, and some people forgot them and some people did not. We have now made considerable progress in the refurbishment projects of three major Government housing estates, namely Laguna, Glacis and Moorish Castle.

905 Once completed, these refurbished estates will most definitely impact positively on the overall aesthetic appearance of the entry into Gibraltar; a far cry from the slum-like appearance that they were left to deteriorate for 16 years, Mr Speaker.

910 From an ecological standpoint, careful consideration has been given to the use of energy-efficient designs and materials in a concerted effort to leave the lightest possible footprint on the environment. This has resulted in a marked improvement to the thermal and acoustic properties of the buildings. As such, a sustainable green design has been applied, both as a process and as a goal.

Mr Speaker, I will proceed to outline in detail all the works that are being undertaken and I will go to this length of detail because it is important to remind people where we are at and how much progress has been made.

915 In Laguna Estate we are well advanced in phases 1 and 2 of the project and have now commenced phase 3. The electrical substation and accompanying civil engineering works to provide the electricity supply to the lifts and telecommunications infrastructure to phase 1 and 2 have now been completed and the work has commenced in phase 3.

Under phase 1, Rodney House is practically complete and only requires the commissioning of the lifts and the paving of the new stores behind Rodney House.

920 The other work which forms part of phase 1 includes Smith Dorrien House, Mallard House, Forbes House, Landport House, Orillion House, Bayside House, Maidstone House, Blackwatch House, Causeway House and Nelson House; and I name them all individually, Mr Speaker, because we have not forgotten. Here most of the external works, including the mono-pitched roofs, are practically complete and works on the lift installations are at an advanced stage.

925 Works to Laguna House, Inundation House, Somerset Court, Liddell House, Kensington House, Jamaica House, Ballymena House, Madeira House and Boyd House, which are part 2 of the phase, have started and are progressing well.

930 We have commenced phase 3 at Resolution House, Forrester House, Somerville House, Devon House and Kings House. Works to the external façade have commenced at these, Mr Speaker. All the above phases are scheduled to be completed by next year.

935 Equally, progress at Glacis Estate is plainly evident. George Jeger House is complete and the installation of a new lift to its south elevation will be starting soon. The removal of the scaffolding to Referendum House is now complete. I can only think of one word to describe the look of the new tower blocks, Mr Speaker, and that is ‘Wow!’ (*Banging on desks*)(*Interjection*) I said a ‘word’ not an adjective! (*Laughter*)

Works to the internal façade have started on all blocks in the estate. (*Interjection*) I said a ‘word’ not an adjective! The mono-pitched roof at Constitution House is virtually complete and those to Brother O’Brien House, Portmore House, Gustavo Bacarisa House and Ironside House are well advanced. The refurbishment of this estate is scheduled for completion by December 2015.

940 The refurbishment and infrastructure works at Moorish Castle Estate are very advanced and consistent progress has been achieved in all blocks. Additionally, refurbishment works to Moorish Castle Married Quarters, which has historically suffered severe problems from water penetration – another forgotten one, Mr Speaker – are programmed to start this summer. The Moorish Castle Estate project is scheduled for completion by the end of this year as well.

945 In addition to the foregoing intensive refurbishment programmes, this Government is also committed to continue the refurbishment works to Alameda Estate. In fact, during this past year refurbishment works have been completed to Kingsway House and Red Sands House, and I can proudly announce that the

refurbishment of Picton House will be undertaken during this financial year and is scheduled to start this summer. Works to Victoria House and Alameda House will follow.

950 The general embellishment, road resurfacing and parking rationalisation works to Varyl Begg Estate, including the upgrade of the surface water drainage system and the replacing of existing access ramps with new disability ramps, Mr Speaker, has started and is progressing well. Phases 1 and 2 have been completed, works to phase 3 have already started and the remaining phases 4 and 5 will be completed by August.

955 As part of a continuous maintenance programme to Edinburgh Estate, consisting of minor external repairs, waterproofing and roof tile repointing, we have managed to complete Thomson House, Donald Delf House and Joseph Lagares House, and we are currently working on Alfred Duarte House, William Gomez House, Joseph Noguera House and Manolo Mascarenhas House; with Jacobo Azagury House programmed to start in August 2015.

960 Apart from the Government manifesto commitments, other extensive refurbishment programmes to Government housing stock have been undertaken, namely the external refurbishment of Sandpits House and Anderson House. These refurbishment works included the external insulation of the façade and waterproofing, the replacement of the existing windows and the construction of new mono-pitched roofs in order to eliminate the long-standing problem of water penetration. I am pleased to inform the Parliament that these works have now been completed.

965 Importantly, Mr Speaker, we are now moving on to other estates – or should I say other *forgotten* estates – and I am pleased to announce that the refurbishment of the new Police Barracks will commence very shortly indeed. The tender for this will be announced next week and the refurbishment will include external refurbishment, construction of a new mono-pitched roof and the installation of a lift.

970 Mr Speaker, there have been many changes at Housing generally, and not just with the change of a Minister a few months ago! At this juncture I would like to credit the work undertaken up until the Cabinet reshuffle by my colleague Minister Balban and the tremendous progress made under his leadership (*Banging on desks*) and of course, before him, our good friend Charles Bruzon whose tenure was sadly called short. (**Several Members:** Hear, hear.) (*Banging on desks*)

975 The Housing Department has seen major changes in the last year. The Technical and Design Division of the Housing Department was transferred to the Housing Works Agency with effect from April 2014, to consolidate the efficiency of how we maintain and repair our housing stock.

A collective grievance created and subsequently unresolved by the previous administration that created an unsustainable fissure in communications between the Agency and the critical Housing Department Technical and Design subsections, has finally been overcome with this amalgamation.

980 Brand new and modern office accommodation was designed and built by the Housing Works Agency to house the former Technical and Design Division, and everyone is now under one roof within the Housing Works Agency premises; and at last, Mr Speaker, the interlaced activities and procedures of two previously contending Government organisations have merged to provide excellent association, interaction and dependability.

985 The merger has enlarged and enhanced the scope of the Housing Works Agency's activities significantly and, whereas initially commissioned only to undertake internal flat repairs, since the recent transfer of the Housing Department Technical and Design Division to the Agency, it is responsible for all maintenance, upgrades and repairs – internal and external – to Government housing stock and also manage the major refurbishment of the housing estates.

990 To compensate for the unsustainable exodus of operatives retiring under the Early Exit Scheme negotiated by the previous administration, this Government has engaged the services of Gibraltar General Construction Company Ltd (GGCCL) who contract out repairs to approved, small construction companies.

995 The fusion of all Housing resources, Mr Speaker, has created the synergy to bridge historic operational rifts to enhance the quality of services extended to Government tenants and it has translated into faster repairs and therefore a quicker turnover of housing allocations.

1000 This is evident if we consider the statistics, Mr Speaker. In 2012, just after we took office, and following our initiative to refurbish empty and abandoned flats, we refurbished 63 flats. The year before that the GSD had refurbished just over half that number – 38 – but in 2010, only 12; the year before that, 2009, 15, because the GSD would rather have flats lay empty and dilapidating than allocate them to families in need. Between 2012 and 2014 we have repaired a total of 135 empty flats. The GSD only repaired 65 in the equivalent period, from 2009 to 2011.

1005 The current Self Repair Scheme represents a vast improvement over the scheme in operation under the previous administration which was unrestrained and prone to abuse. Tenants who are allocated a new flat can undertake their own refurbishments using materials provided and delivered on-site by the Housing Works Agency, and now strict accountability policies have been introduced. This has been instrumental in a marked reduction in waiting time for the delivery of flats to new tenants and has significant savings in labour costs for Government.

1010 The new scheme was introduced in September 2012 and has since extended this service to nearly 400 tenants who frequently express their satisfaction with the level and quality of service afforded via this Government's endeavour.

We have noted an increase in applications for housing, Mr Speaker, since 9th December, but this is mainly due to those expressing an interest in purchasing low-cost co-ownership affordable flats.

1015 The Housing Allocation Committee meets on a monthly basis in order to discuss applicants who may need to be housed before others due to medical or social issues. The Committee provides valued advice to the Housing Authority. However, it is not for the Housing Allocation Committee to allocate dwellings under the Housing Act which was passed by the GSD in 2007.

1020 Much mischief has been caused by the Opposition in relation to an answer that I provided this Parliament last week in respect of housing allocations, where they have tried to twist what I thought was a very clear answer into something that was not; much political mischief and scaremongering, Mr Speaker, and very telling that the press release issued by the GSD was not by an elected Member. For this I actually credit my elected shadow because he, as any other Opposition Member who has been a Minister for Housing, will understand what I mean and therefore realises that this is a non-point.

1025 In fact, Mr Speaker, the reality is that it was the GSD who made the changes to the way that allocations are made under the Housing Act. They introduced this change because houses used to be allocated by the Housing Allocation Committee and they no longer do so since 2011 when the law was changed by the GSD. Allocations must be made by the Authority and the statutory authority in the legislation is the Minister, so much ado about nothing! (**Two Members:** Hear, hear.) Yes, Mr Speaker, because if the GSD have forgotten I will remind themselves of something that the then Chief Minister, now backbencher, the Hon. Sir Peter Caruana, said in answer to a question by the late Charles Bruzon on allocations at the Mid Harbours Estate... The answer – and I will read from Hansard, Mr Speaker, is ‘the allocation was done by the Government, not the Housing Allocation Committee,’ albeit it was done by reference to the waiting lists, so –

1035 **A Member:** How many?

A Member: Yes, there were lots –

1040 **Hon. Miss S J Sacramento:** Well, it goes on to say that there were 490 letters issued. So, Mr Speaker, on one occasion – (*Interjection*) only one occasion in 2007, the GSD... the Minister – well, the Chief Minister at the time – said that 490 people had been offered accommodation directly by the Minister. Well, this was done in accordance with the Act that they changed! (*Interjection*) (*Banging on desks*) I would like to thank the hon. backbencher for assisting me in that regard! (*Interjections*) Yes, Mr Speaker, the hon. backbencher has reminded us that those almost 500 people were directly offered a house at Mid Harbours Estate by the Government, not the Housing Allocation Committee, just before the election.

1045 **A Member:** It should have gone before.

A Member: No! (*Laughter and interjections*)

1050 **A Member:** The truth will out! (*Interjection and laughter*)

Hon. Miss S J Sacramento: So I am very grateful for that intervention, Mr Speaker.

1055 In keeping with our established policy of holding regular meetings with tenants' associations, senior officers of my Ministry and sometimes myself continue to liaise closely to identify areas of collective concern and agree restorative measures.

1060 All key players – the Housing Ministry, the Housing Department, Housing Works Agency, GGCCCL and the Royal Gibraltar Police – afford representation at empowered executive levels so that complex problems can be identified, discussed and tackled swiftly. The relationships now born from these regular engagements go a long way to reveal the communal issues that truly concern the tenants of each estate and foster a constructive spirit of partnership between Housing officials and tenants' representatives.

The Housing Department and Housing Works Agency staff continue to support the tenants' associations on a day-to-day basis. Regular meetings are also held with Action for Housing where individual and general issues of concern are discussed.

1065 One final change at Housing, Mr Speaker, is that the Housing Department is now based at New Harbours in order to enable the Government to fulfil another manifesto commitment and put the City Hall to better use; and it is now a public art gallery. The offices have been purpose built and are now more accommodating to the public, are accessible to people with disabilities, Mr Netto, and have also provided a better working environment for the staff, as the offices are better suited for their needs. There is more

1070 privacy for clients and it is a more secure location for staff. In the case of the rent collection, we have maintained a presence in the heart of town and we have a counter available at the Post Office.

As this Department also moves with the times and joins e-government, tenants are able to pay rent online. Efforts are made to encourage this method of payment and staff have engaged with the Citizens' Advice Bureau to promote this at their Senior Citizens' Computer Fun Day, which has proved popular.

1075 Such is the improvement made in the Ministry for Housing, whether the Housing Department or the Housing Works Agency, that this has even been recognised by the Ombudsman who, in this year's annual report, has noted the marked reduction in housing complaints.

1080 Finally, Mr Speaker, I turn to my tourism responsibilities. Over the past three years, and indeed since I took over the portfolio as Minister for Tourism in December 2014, this Government has demonstrated a firm commitment to tourism – an area of the economy we immediately recognised as crucial for our sustainable prosperity, development and economic growth, as an advanced and forward-looking community.

1085 Since we were elected, the sense of dynamism and energy that we have managed to instil into every aspect of our involvement, whether in promoting the Gibraltar tourist product abroad, in our endeavours to open up new markets and fresh business opportunities in our dealings with stakeholders in the private sector who have formed a successful and solid partnership with us in our common aims, has been unprecedented.

At this juncture, Mr Speaker, I wish to credit the sterling work undertaken by my friend and colleague, Minister Costa, who held this portfolio until the reshuffle (**A Member:** Hear, hear.) (*Banging on desks*) and during his tenure, Minister Costa raised the standard of the organisation, making it focused and dynamic and laying the foundation for the excellent results that we are now yielding.

1090 In the past 12 months we have continued to pursue our objectives with the same clear focus, sparing no effort and investing the necessary financial, material and human resources to upgrade our unique product; refurbishing some of the tourist sites and attractions in order to ensure that we do justice to our growing reputation as a leading travel destination in the Mediterranean, and one of the most exciting and interesting short break opportunities available on the holiday market.

1095 Last year, Mr Speaker, my predecessor declared that, notwithstanding the spectacular progress achieved since December 2011 in this area, Her Majesty's Government of Gibraltar would strive to continue transforming the tremendous potential for growth in the local tourist industry, into concrete proposals for the benefit of our entire community. In the course of my Budget speech I will provide a detailed account of what we have achieved in the last 12 months.

1100 Gibraltar is well connected by sea, land and air, with regular flights to the main cities in Britain and now Morocco. The steady growth of the Gibraltar International Airport is critical to the success of our tourism strategy. The Gibraltar Tourist Board, in partnership with Gibraltar International Airport and the Ministry for Tourism, have worked relentlessly in this sector. As part of the policy of expanding air connectivity to consolidate the Rock's position as a leading short break destination in the Mediterranean, the Ministry has secured two new air routes in 2015; this makes a total of three new routes introduced during our term in office. (**Two Members:** Hear, hear.) (*Banging on desks*)

1110 Indeed, Mr Speaker, the expansion of the aviation services in Gibraltar has been noteworthy and this summer we have added Bristol, Tangier and Casablanca to our list of destinations, bringing the total to eight; London Gatwick, Heathrow, Luton, Manchester and Birmingham, being the others. The additional five-weekly flights will increase the number of weekly departures from Gibraltar International Airport to 37.

1115 The new twice-weekly service to Tangier operated by Morocco's national airline, Royal Air Maroc, officially commenced on Sunday, 29th March. This flight is estimated the shortest intercontinental flight in the world, and will start and end in Casablanca – Morocco's main city and, importantly, economic hub, because from there, connections are available throughout Morocco and other destinations in Europe, the Middle East, Africa and North America. This initiative forms part of a wider approach by Government to promote Gibraltar as a tourism destination as well as offer opportunities in financial services and commerce to Morocco.

1120 Gibraltar also welcomed a new UK destination on Sunday, 19th April, with easyJet offering a three-times-a-week service to Bristol and this has been heralded by easyJet as the most popular of its new routes. (**Two Members:** Hear, hear.)

We are greatly encouraged by the steady increase in air passenger departures in UK scheduled flights since 2011, when just over 193,500 were registered – a figure which has gone up to 209,100 in 2014, notwithstanding a slight dip in 2013.

1125 In respect of air passenger arrivals on scheduled flights from the UK, Mr Speaker, these have risen from 189,500 in 2011, to 204,600 in 2014 – both figures represent an increase of almost 8% since we took office. (**A Member:** Hear, hear.) (*Banging on desks*)

1130 Total passenger numbers at Gibraltar International Airport exceed 400,000 for the first time ever! We are confident that the new routes to Bristol and Tangier/Casablanca will have an impact on our air traffic and open up fresh opportunities for the tourist industry both in Morocco and the south west of the UK.

1135 Another crucial aspect of our work in respect of the very tough and competitive aviation sector is the policy of continuing to engage with existing and new airlines in actively carrying out joint marketing campaigns to promote Gibraltar as a unique leisure and business destination, the latest being with easyJet in the Bristol region and with Royal Air Maroc. These are often silent, understated tasks, steadily conducted behind the scenes which later produce the positive results that we all aim for.

1140 But we are not a complacent administration, Mr Speaker, or one to rest on our laurels – or as Mr Netto reminded us yesterday, ‘to take the foot off the pedal’ – and the public can rest assured that we will leave no stone unturned in our efforts to achieve even greater results, in our relentless efforts to attract more and more visitors to our shores, to ensure sustained growth on all fronts. Her Majesty’s Government of Gibraltar is always mindful of seeking increases in air passenger capacity on existing services, in addition to exploring the possibilities of opening up new links to regional destinations in the UK, as well as other destinations in Europe. *(Interjection)* Not necessarily, Mr Speaker. *(Interjections)* To respond to that snide, *(Laughter)* I do not agree that this – *(Interjection)* Well, Mr Speaker, in response to that remark that this is only as a result of having a new Airport terminal, I do not agree. It is as a result of the hard work (**Several**
1145 **Members:** Hear, hear.) *(Banging on desks)* of the people involved in securing the routes, Mr Speaker! *(Interjection)*

Mr Speaker, perhaps I could continue with my speech! *(Laughter)*

1150 **A Member:** I apologise to the hon... *[Inaudible]*

Hon. Miss S J Sacramento: We are working on route development out of Gibraltar International Airport with parties outside Gibraltar who have shown an interest in partnering with us in the expansion of operations. This could have the consequent effect of boosting passenger numbers even further through the terminal in the long term.

1155 We want to continue building on our success of the past three years, to put Gibraltar on the map as a major international destination for leisure and cultural tourism, to significantly increase overnight visitors in our hotels, promoting our air services, cruise industry, shopping experience and our port as a cluster for professional shipping and maritime activity. This, Mr Speaker, is an iron cast commitment.

1160 Gibraltar’s hotel sector is going through exciting times; times of change – we like that, Mr Speaker – and new opportunities. Total arrivals at hotels are up by 8.5%, at 58,744 – the highest figure since 2008. Other arrivals grew most as a reflection of continuing growth in the business sector arrivals and it is encouraging to see arrivals climb for sporting and cultural visits.

1165 Tourist arrivals in 2014 were affected by the closure of the Queen’s Hotel and the refurbishment of the Rock Hotel. It is encouraging to see that room nights offered are up, again to the highest point since 2008. Room nights sold grew to an all-time high.

The average length of stay for tourist arrivals has increased from 3.46 in 2013 to 3.94 in 2014 – the highest since 1994, Mr Speaker. This is encouraging as it reflects our efforts to increase overnight tourism. (**Several Members:** Hear, hear.) *(Banging on desks)*

1170 Room occupancy and sleeper occupancy have fallen marginally but this is linked to growth and it is a fair point that supply has grown faster than the demand, but we are confident that this will catch up.

Mr Speaker, again, guest nights offered are the highest since 1992. Guest nights sold are the highest since 2008, again with tourist arrivals growing faster than any other arrivals, linked once again to the increase in the average length of stay. The average length of stay has remained consistent but it is wonderful to note once again that in the case of tourist arrivals it has increased.

1175 The impact of the Sunborn Hotel – the first locally established luxury floating five-star hotel – plus the much-welcomed major refurbishment projects across some hotels, such as the Rock Hotel and the Caleta Palace Hotel, have given new impetus to the trade, and we have seen these results translate into the statistics that I have just reviewed.

1180 Gibraltar now boasts a much-admired five-star hotel, the Sunborn, which has become an integral part of the Rock’s social and leisure scene. The quality and sophistication on offer across a broad range of services is unprecedented for Gibraltar and its presence in one of Gibraltar’s primary nightlife locations, Ocean Village, has given renewed vibrancy to the area. Importantly, we have now developed an interesting and much-needed variety in our local hotel bed stock, to satisfy customers, whether they are seeking budget holiday-type accommodation, to the intermediate and the luxury styled product.

1185 There are also proposals in the pipeline for new hotels like the Marriott Holiday Inn Express, a major extension of the Caleta Hotel, as well as a new boutique hotel in the Upper Town which will increase the availability of quality hotel accommodation on the Rock.

1190 Mr Speaker, our pro-active marketing strategy over the past year has been successful in selling the Rock as the ideal short-term holiday destination on a global scale, and the improved tourist product has also had an effect on the growing number of cruise ship visitors to the Rock.

Whereas in 2013, the total number reached 284,870, the figure for 2014 has risen to 298,512 and it is expected to exceed the 300,000 mark in 2015 with a total of 212 ships scheduled to call at Gibraltar, this being up by 32 calls over 2014.

1195 This is an area where, it has to be said, the Gibraltar Tourist Board's partnership with the private sector, with the dedicated local agents – whether it be shipping or shore excursions, which form such a vital part of the industry – has produced the desired results.

1200 We have spared no effort to consistently promote Gibraltar as a leading cruise destination during our participation at the main international cruise industry gatherings and through our membership of the very pro-active and influential MedCruise Association. I am very pleased to confirm that Gibraltar will be hosting the MedCruise General Assembly in the spring of 2017, and this will be the second time that this important event is held on the Rock. (*Banging on desks*)

This year we have continued the successful policy introduced by my predecessor, of securing one-to-one meetings with senior cruise industry executives in UK, Miami and at the meetings of MedCruise, and building up strong personal relationships with the top decision-makers.

1205 Among the highlights on this front, has been the agreement with Royal Caribbean International, for the visit to the Gibraltar Port of its newest megaship, Anthem of the Seas – the largest cruise ship ever to call upon us – no less than seven times in 2015, bringing an excess of 30,000 passengers to the Rock and representing a significant boost to our tourism sector.

1210 This demonstrates the confidence by the industry in our role as a leading cruise port in the Mediterranean and sends a strong signal that Gibraltar is a serious and committed player in the industry, able to efficiently handle some of the largest vessels in the world. Furthermore, Government is actively considering a number of options to increase the berthing capabilities of the port to handle more large ships simultaneously.

1215 Our energetic policy to support the cruise industry and give the port a further competitive edge has further been enhanced by the introduction of amendments to the Port Rules for a series of general discounts, Mr Speaker. This initiative will incentivise Royal Caribbean vessels from continuing to call beyond 2015 and seek to attract more calls by other cruise companies.

1220 It is also worth noting how Carnival UK, a part of P&O Cruises and Cunard, has declared that Gibraltar is the third most visited port for them to call in 2015, after its home base of Southampton and Lisbon – such is the success of our strategy.

One of the aims that we have continued to pursue is the issue of cruise turnarounds which would make a huge boost to our tourist trade in every sense. We are working hard for this to materialise and we continue to encourage several cruise companies to consider this activity, as this would provide incredible economic opportunity for Gibraltar.

1225 In the past three years, Mr Speaker, the Gibraltar Tourist Board has made a capital investment of £3 million in the Rock's major tourist attractions. At St Michael's Cave, the jewel in the crown of the local product, it has been extensively refurbished and modernised, creating a more contemporary look inside. Significantly, the entrance was completely redesigned and has the installation of a wheelchair lift to improve access – I am sure Mr Netto will be happy to hear that – and the stairs have been fitted with lights and a new spectacular 30-minute *son et lumiere* show that runs all day and enhances the dramatic geological features and striking views in the caverns of the interior.

1230 The 100 Ton Gun site has also been refurbished and there has been beautification of the external area and it now also has an accessibility ramp which extends the view of the gun to people with disabilities – I am sure Mr Netto is making note of this as well! In the past they only had access to the exhibition.

1235 New mannequins in historical costume have been located at all the gun embrasures at The Great Siege Tunnels, known as 'the Galleries', adding a realistic feel to the site. The figures complement the information panels and props that were also put in place.

1240 The World War Two tunnels have also benefitted from the refurbishment programme and the construction of new accessible toilets for persons with disabilities. Improved facilities for staff have also been provided. The viewing platform at Jew's Gate has also been resurfaced.

In addition, there are also significant improvements to the nature reserve which are being spearheaded by my colleague, the Minister for the Environment, and will greatly enhance the Upper Rock as a tourist product, not least with a spectacular suspension bridge at the newly refurbished Royal Anglian Way.

1245 I have detailed these improvements, Mr Speaker, as an investment in our tourist product because I am delighted to report that they have had a noticeable, positive impact in the number of tourists visiting the Upper Rock. Whereas in 2013 just over 732,000 were recorded, in 2014 the number of visitors rose to just over 791,000; 2015 has seen a consistent increase in the number of visitors to the Upper Rock and at the end of April this year visitor numbers were up by 9.2% over last year.

1250 Our unprecedented investment in the tourist product will ensure that we continue to have first class tourist attractions that people can enjoy whether residents or visitors, or indeed people with disabilities. We want tourists to receive a good impression of what we have to offer and enjoy our product to the full. This Government has shown its full commitment to tourism like never before.

1255 As with all improvements and refurbishments that we have carried out at the beaches and tourist attractions, Mr Speaker, foremost in our mind has been the need to ensure the accessibility features and that these are included at design stage. This has been a trademark of my ministerial responsibility. Of course, this unprecedented investment has been a resounding success with our beaches and all the improvements that we have made.

1260 Moving on, Mr Speaker, the Rock has been an ideal location for weddings... and as part of our new marketing strategy to include the weddings market in Gibraltar, and this has been reinvigorated. Two legislative initiatives last year – the amendment to the Marriage Act, which now allows marriage ceremonies to be conducted aboard locally-registered passenger ships under special licence, and the introduction of the Civil Partnership Act, which permits same sex civil partnerships, has seen more couples coming to Gibraltar to tie the knot. The changes create new business opportunities, closely linked to Gibraltar's tourist, hospitality industry and shipping registration.

1265 Since the introduction of the civil partnership legislation it is now possible to develop new ideas and products aimed specifically at the LGBT market and we have noted that a number of tourists have already taken up this opportunity in the last year.

1270 The initiative has opened up new business opportunities with what is widely considered a very profitable segment of the tourist market. We are keen to broaden our horizons in this respect, by participating in new business opportunities, and this year the Gibraltar Tourist Board has attended two well-known international events and trade fairs aimed at the LGBT market.

The GTB has also carried out a promotion campaign with a leading LGBT publication, advertising the fact that same sex couples can come to Gibraltar to enter a civil partnership as part of a tailor-made tourist package.

1275 Events-led tourism has been an innovative concept expanded by Government to repackage everything that Gibraltar has to offer in new and novel ways that are proving both extremely popular with the public, whether resident or visitors, and at the same time, affording the tourist industry a magnificent business platform to showcase the many attractions, leisure products and facilities of our unique destination.

1280 The dual rationale, Mr Speaker, is simple: organise a first-class cultural event with an international dimension that will appeal to the general public across the board and, by doing so, be assured that you will be attracting visitors to Gibraltar as well, on the strength of those events. We have found that many visitors will find the experience engaging enough to want to start booking a return to the Rock as soon as they arrive home.

1285 We have worked closely with the Ministry for Culture on joint initiatives to encourage event-led tourism to Gibraltar and the idea has worked exceedingly well. Gibraltar has seen a glittering constellation of recording artists and chart-topping performers descend on our community, to the appreciation of sell-out jubilant crowds at the Gibraltar Music Festival, celebrations of local cuisine at Calentita, an international chess festival – the Tradewise Open Chess festival, the international Jazz Festival and of course the Gibunco Gibraltar International Literary Festival, whose third edition we are already organising for November 2015 and which I am pleased to say is going from strength to strength.

1290 All these tremendously successful events, Mr Speaker, have served to promote Gibraltar as an attractive tourist destination. I have no doubt that the literary festival will continue to develop on its success for many years to come.

1295 Mr Speaker, the United Kingdom Gibraltar Tourism Association (UKGTA) and Gibraltar House in London continue to perform sterling work to co-ordinate all our tourism partners and stakeholders in the primary task of selling and promoting Gibraltar as a tourist destination.

I am delighted to report that Scottish tour operator Osprey Holidays has this year become the newest addition to the expanding pool of UK tour operators to feature Gibraltar. The company specialise in quality tailor-made short breaks to over 50 exciting locations around Europe.

1300 We are excited that Osprey Holidays have decided to team up with the Gibraltar Tourist Board and work together to promote the Rock as a tourist destination. The Tourist Board actively encourages the expansion of the overnight leisure market from our core markets in the UK and it is particularly encouraging to see the expansion in the Scottish market.

1305 Once again, this Government has shown its drive and dedication to delivering more visitors to the Rock. The tourist industry is a key part of our economy and we keep working hard to expand our product in the new markets.

Our concerted approach to joint marketing campaigns and the GTB's direct marketing activities in the UK and in other markets, has been yielding results in our overnight tourism sector, as has been shown by the statistics, Mr Speaker, because we have seen that this approach has already yield its results, and it is

1310 precisely this sector where more growth is encouraged, as overnight visitors contribute greatly to the economy and deliver and always welcome revenue scheme to those industries.

Mr Speaker, my main priority as Minister for Tourism will be to ensure that Gibraltar continues to build on its deserved reputation as a unique tourist destination which offers first class services, value for money and a whole series of exciting tourist attractions and beautiful sites. It is also important that we keep on
1315 working to ensure growth in our cruise industry, in expanding air connectivity still further to other European destinations, in strengthening links with local tourist industry stakeholders and partners, both in Gibraltar and in the UK, for the benefit of all.

Our economic structures reflect the proven resilience acquired over many years and countless challenges, and tourism is a vital component of the economy in our long-term, sustainable prosperity. (**A Member:** Hear, hear.) (*Banging on desks*)
1320

My aim, Mr Speaker, is to increase the number of tourists who decide to spend their time with us, whether from UK or other European destinations or Morocco, that we continue to invest wisely, as we have done in the past three years, to improve and repackage our tourist product in a manner that allows Gibraltar to remain ahead of the curve and to economically benefit from all our tourist assets.

We will strengthen our efforts through strategic planning and marketing to achieve effective return on investments. The brilliant figures show the strength of the tourism industry right now, Mr Speaker, the great news is that the year ahead is expected to be even better, with growth continuing. Our new tourism strategy is working and it has brought a record number of visitors to our Rock.
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In conclusion, Mr Speaker, while we continue to attract investment and develop tourism as an essential driver of our economy, our duty is to spend the revenue that we generate responsibly and prioritise in delivering to those who need it the most, whether it is through Housing, Social Services or any Department that helps the public. The Chief Minister's address on Monday is evidence of exactly this.
1330

We I have spent three and a half years working as a team of Ministers who are great friends, hard-working, dynamic and, moreover, all of us work first and foremost with Gibraltar and its people at the heart of everything that we do, Mr Speaker, in a way that Gibraltar stopped experiencing in the years prior to the change. (*Interjection*)
1335

We are a strong, prosperous nation, Mr Speaker. Our spending priorities are focused on those who need it and, true to our socialist values, we have delivered for our people.

In conclusion, a year of great success and a term which has achieved important developments for a fair and just society. As this first Parliament will draw to a close at the end of the year, I am very satisfied and immensely proud of all that has been achieved, and I would like to credit and thank all of those who have worked with me during this term.
1340

Several Members: Hear, hear. (*Banging on desks*)
1345

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Mr Speaker, in the effusion of that reward for a brilliant Budget speech, in respect of a brilliant Budget, I move that the House do now adjourn until three o'clock this afternoon.

1350 **Mr Speaker:** The House will recess until 3.00 this afternoon.

The House recessed at 1.33 p.m. and resumed its sitting at 3.04 p.m.