



PROCEEDINGS OF THE GIBRALTAR PARLIAMENT

AFTERNOON SESSION: 4.30 p.m. – 8.29 p.m.

Gibraltar, Thursday, 30th June 2022

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The Gibraltar Parliament

The Parliament met at 4.30 p.m.

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

[ACTING CLERK TO THE PARLIAMENT: S Galliano Esq *in attendance*]

Appropriation Bill 2022 – Second Reading – Debate continued

Clerk: Meeting of Parliament, Thursday, 30th June 2022.
We continue with the Appropriation Bill.

5 **Mr Speaker:** The Hon. Samantha Sacramento.

Minister for Justice, Equality and Public Standards and Regulations (Hon. Miss S J Sacramento): Mr Speaker, it is a privilege to once again address Parliament and it continues to be an honour to serve this community as a member of Her Majesty's Government of Gibraltar, now
10 in my 11th year. On this occasion, I set out my Budget address in my capacity as Minister with responsibility for Justice, Equality and Public Standards and Regulations.

Before I speak about those responsibilities, I would like to begin by making reference to the pandemic that we have just emerged from and which clearly is still not over and has even played some mischief at our Budget session and denied us from the enjoying the opportunity of listening
15 to the Father of the House deliver his speech. I am sure we can all agree that when it comes to Sir Joe and the Budget, reading his speech is not the same as being in his presence when he delivers it. (**Hon. Chief Minister and another Member:** Hear, hear.) I have been in touch with him this morning and I wish my friend a very speedy recovery from COVID. (*Banging on desks*) This is a stark reminder that COVID is not yet over, and neither is the economic effect that COVID has
20 had, not just on us but globally. For this reason, I just do not understand a lot of what has been said by the Members opposite so far. They speak as if without any realisation or acknowledgment of the global economic situation. Where have they been for the last two years? The bottom line is that we have to tighten our belts just a little bit, just for two years, to be able to get us out of this, but of course pensioners and those on lower wages will be insulated, as they rightly ought to be. I must congratulate the Chief Minister for being brave in what he has done in the Budget and
25 his rationale for so doing. (**A Member:** Hear, hear.) Let's hope that we can transition back to normality as soon as possible.

Speaking about what we have had to endure from the Members opposite, I must call out something that was said by the Hon. Mr Clinton yesterday. I am sure he did not mean to mislead
30 Parliament in what he said, but he was clearly disingenuous in the way that he presented the matter, in that he did not provide the full picture. The Hon. Mr Clinton made a big fuss about our business-class travel and this is because his last Parliament question was quite one sided and limited only to asking when we travel in business class – he never asked how many times we travel otherwise. I travel economy as much as I travel business, and we all do – the Chief Minister, the
35 Deputy Chief Minister and the Minister for Tourism, who are the ones who travel the most, I know also travel economy – but he did not mention that part, did he? I only travel when it is absolutely

necessary, as we all do. Personally, I do not like to travel. I hate packing, I hate flying, I hate airports, I get travel sick, but I do it because it is my job to do it, and we all do it because it is our duty. Only last week I was in Berlin for 48 hours and I flew Ryanair – I am not sure whether that
40 classifies even as economy. When I travelled to Iceland, I travelled economy as well. That trip was subsidised by the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) because I was travelling in my capacity as Chair of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP).

While the Hon. Mr Clinton pontificates about business-class travel from his pedestal, I need to remind him that last year we both travelled to Northern Ireland for a CPA conference –
45 *(Interjection by Hon. R M Clinton)* Mr Speaker, it is my Budget address, perhaps the hon. Gentleman can wait for me to finish. We travelled to Northern Ireland. I travelled direct on easyJet and – get this, Mr Speaker – the hon. Gentleman travelled BA business class and not direct, so he had two flights there and two flights back. I make this point – *(Interjection by Hon. R M Clinton)*

50 **Mr Speaker:** I cannot force anybody to give way. It is in the hon. Member's – *(Interjection by Hon. Chief Minister)*
Please continue.

Hon. Miss S J Sacramento: Mr Speaker, what I have said in my intervention is fact, and what I
55 have said is that the hon. Member did not provide the full facts in his. I will continue, Mr Speaker. In August 2020, in the middle of the pandemic, I was appointed Minister for Health and I held this responsibility until a few months ago. It has been a very difficult, all-consuming and intense time. *(Banging on desk)* The job of being Minister with responsibility for Civil Contingencies and also Minister for Health meant that the work was relentless and I have been pretty much working
60 on adrenaline for two years.

When I became Minister for Health, at the outset the priority was to support an organisation that was at the coalface in the battle against COVID, particularly at ERS. Additionally, it became apparent to me that I had two major priorities as Minister for Health. The first was to make mental health a priority, not just for the GHA but for the whole of Gibraltar. Using the Public Health
65 England Situational Analysis Report 2019 – which I immediately published when I became Minister for Health – as a benchmark, I launched the five-year strategy in July 2021 with the objective of improving the mental health and well-being of the population of Gibraltar by having a comprehensive, integrated mental health system that promotes self-care and recovery and reduces stigma. The strategy was developed through a comprehensive multi-agency stakeholder,
70 patient and public engagement process, with listening and learning being a cornerstone principle. The strategy has four overarching strategic priorities aligned with the World Health Organization Global Mental Health Action Plan 2013-20. Importantly, the strategy has an inbuilt mechanism of accountability and includes timelines for the implementation of the key milestones. There were some very immediate improvements last year in the delivery of the GHA mental health services,
75 including the introduction of a mental health crisis line at the 111. I wish to thank, at this point, the members of the Statutory Boards, the Mental Health Board and the Mental Health Tribunal. An enormous amount of time is dedicated by those who sit on these, and they do so on a voluntary basis.

Immediately, also, I became acutely aware of the impact that the pandemic was having on our
80 hospital services and I feared the outcome of its aftermath. It was the invaluable help and guidance of Prof. Ian Cumming OBE – whom I had initially engaged in January 2021 to devise and lead on our COVID vaccination strategy but who became invested in assisting Gibraltar – that we worked together on what were to become landmark reforms and the Reset, Restart and Recover programme later that year. On 30th November 2021 I announced these landmark reforms with
85 the objective of improving the GHA services provided to patients and the accountability of the Authority to the Government and, therefore, the taxpayer. This represented radical reform. A seven-point plan for Reset, Restart and Recover was announced and also a reconfiguration of the GHA board to ensure its function as the key strategic oversight body for the GHA, the removal of

the Minister for Health as the chair of the board, a new, independent chair of the board appointed and the introduction of a new position of director general to provide overall leadership in the organisation. This restructure represented our serious and genuine desire to transform the GHA. I could think of no one better to be the interim chair of the board at this time than Prof. Cumming and he was asked to take up this role on an interim basis. I wish him and the board all the best in ensuring that the GHA delivers for us all.

Mr Speaker, in my time as Minister for Health I worked with very dedicated professionals. I thank them for their guidance and support during this time. The services of three nurses in the GHA have been recognised with honours. Of these, I have worked very closely with the Head of Elderly Services, Susan Vallejo, and the Director of Nursing, Sandie Gracia, and I can certainly recognise that their honour is very well deserved. My congratulations to them. *(Banging on desks)*

Starting with my responsibility as Minister for Civil Contingencies, Mr Speaker, as you will imagine, the centre of the Government's ongoing response to the COVID-19 pandemic has been the Office of Civil Contingencies: 2021 and 2022 have continued to be largely dominated by the global pandemic as well as planning for a possible no negotiated Brexit outcome and dealing with the consequences of the ongoing war in Ukraine.

When our vaccines arrived at the beginning of 2021 – and we have to thank the UK government for their generous and constant supply of these – our community saw a rapid decline in positive cases, deaths and hospitalisations. The hugely successful vaccination programme executed by the GHA allowed us to start winning the battle against COVID, and as restrictions quickly started to be eased Gibraltar became the centre of attention for a post-vaccination world. As the new Director of Public Health expressed her concerns over vaccine effectiveness waning, the booster programme was launched in early October with the aim of offering maximum protection to our people over the winter months. As cases in the boosted population started to improve again and hospitalisations of positive cases were kept at a steady and manageable rate, we were once again reminded about the risks from new variants of concern, but with a large uptake in boosters and with a better understanding of the Omicron variant the first quarter of 2022 has allowed Gibraltar to continue with its exit strategy and easing the vast majority of restrictions. The last two years have been painfully difficult for everyone in our community but it now seems that we are well on our road to recovery, noting of course that we must continue to remain cautious and continuously monitor the situation.

When Russia invaded Ukraine on 24th February 2022, Gibraltarians living in Ukraine with their young families reached out to us for support. The Office of Civil Contingencies assisted with the repatriation of the family by making the necessary travel arrangements and deploying one of its officers to Poland to meet with the family, to deliver the necessary emergency passports and other travel documentation. The Office of Civil Contingencies has also co-ordinated much of the support given to other Ukrainian families who fled the war-torn country to safety in Gibraltar, where they have been provided with accommodation at the Retreat Centre and co-ordinated support from the Care Agency and the Department of Education among others.

I could not have asked for a more dedicated or focused team to steer us through these extremely difficult times. My thanks to the Civil Contingencies Co-ordinator, Mr Ivor Lopez, whose efforts were also recognised in his very well-deserved award, and Ernest Danino and Brian Brooks, the latter who recently, with others, also made a round trip to deliver medical supplies to Ukraine on behalf of the Red Cross – a selfless endeavour, indeed, and they should be congratulated.

On my Justice responsibilities I will commence with the Gibraltar Financial Intelligence Unit (GFIU). GFIU plays a critical role in the fight against economic crime, but it also uses financial intelligence to tackle other criminal conduct. The unit has, over the last two years, made an immense contribution to ensure that Gibraltar features well in the Financial Action Task Force Post-Observation Period. In the process, it has built on the successes of 2020, driven decisively with new developments that will create innovative approaches to tackle financial crime.

In 2021, GFIU received almost 4,000 suspicious activity reports. This has placed a significant workload on the unit, but it has also taken advantage of its digital transformation, with better

analytical software that helps strengthen its capacity by creating a modern digital ecosystem that harnesses the many pieces of information received from a wide range of sources.

145 GFIU is not just providing training locally, and this is quite a remarkable recognition of the level of work that they deliver. In 2021, GFIU was invited by the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime to deliver training to Morocco's financial institutions, sharing Gibraltar's experience in improving engagement with the private sector to detect illicit financial activity to end human trafficking. It is also delivering training to INTERPOL's project manager, an initiative designed to enhance capacity in Latin America and the Caribbean countries to target the proceeds of smuggling persons or trafficking in human beings.

150 Another significant development has been the establishment of a public-private partnership, called the Financial Liaison and Intelligence Network. This partnership is led by GFIU and is comprised of Gibraltar's banks, the Royal Gibraltar Police, HM Customs and the Gibraltar Financial Services Commission, and is expected to greatly enhance information sharing.

155 As the lead agency for counter proliferation financing, GFIU established the Joint Co-ordinating Intelligence Group to Counter Proliferation Financing, a pioneering working group that ensures that Gibraltar mitigates the threat to global security by those intent on facilitating the illicit development of weapons of mass destruction.

160 Mr Speaker, turning now to the Royal Gibraltar Police (RGP), the last year has seen the RGP work to achieve the recommendations and areas for improvement set out in the 2020 report by HM Inspectorate of Constabularies and Fire and Rescue Services. This has meant the RGP undertaking some significant reform to achieve this. Crime recording is now more in line with the Home Office Counting Rules and the RGP has established the criteria which have been followed by UK police forces. Further to this, the code of ethics has been embedded in all operational activity, determining standards of behaviour and the principles of policing. This activity is now co-ordinated by the Ethics Champions Lead, with an Independent Committee on Ethics overseeing ethical dilemmas in the RGP. To achieve this, the RGP has also introduced policies and procedures determining standards of behaviour, mechanisms for officers and staff to report on poor behavioural standards and control measures to protect the reputation of the organisation. The entire workforce and any external partners working with the RGP will require to be vetted, as is the practice by UK police forces, and a vetting unit has been established with an emphasis on a new internal counter corruption unit.

175 The recently created Victims of Crime Support team has trained officers in line with the Victims in Criminal Proceedings Regulations. Every victim of crime is now contacted and provided with support through the entire investigation process. Combatting domestic abuse also features highly on the RGP's agenda with the creation of a domestic abuse unit implementing better protective measures for victims of crime.

The Government is, of course, committed to supporting the RGP. Last week I had the pleasure of speaking at the passing out parade for 17 new recruits. I wish them all the best in their careers in the policing family. Recruitment for a new intake of officers has already commenced.

180 Turning to the Gibraltar Courts Service, during the past year the Law Courts have continued to work extraordinarily hard to deal effectively with the current substantial workload brought about as a result of the scaling down of operations during both COVID-19 lockdown periods. The current full complement of judges, coupled with the fact that when hit with the pandemic there was no backlog at either the Magistrates' Court or the Supreme Court, allows the Law Courts to continue to be in a strong position. The Rt Hon. Sir Martin Moore-Bick retired this year, in March, as a Justice of Appeal, bringing the current number of appointed Justices down to four. In order to maintain the complement of the Court of Appeal Justices at six, it is envisaged that recruitment will proceed for two more Justices. As a result of a number of retirements and in order to maintain the complement of existing Justices of the Peace, on advice from the Judicial Service Commission it is anticipated that the recruitment process will shortly be advertised for appointment. Finally, acting on advice from the Judicial Service Commission, the Government has agreed to continue to provide funding for a fourth Judge of the Supreme Court.

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Mr Speaker, now the Government Law Offices (GLO), the Government lawyers. Since the last Budget speech, our team of lawyers has continued to play a crucial part in delivering legal advice to the Government, shaping legislation and providing legal representation to our law enforcement agencies. On legislation, during the last year the Government Law Offices published the following legislation: 18 Government Bills, 16 Acts, 344 Legal Notices and a staggering 423 COVID regulations. At this point I really would like to thank the small team who were working on the COVID regulations so intensely during the last two years, because sometimes we literally had to work day and night to get those regulations right. Related to Brexit, the GLO have continued with the publication of measures to revoke or amend retained directly applicable EU legislation under the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2019. The following legislative projects have also come to fruition during this period, including the commencement of the Freedom of Information legislation. The Register of Property Occupation Act 2021 was also commenced and associated subsidiary legislation published, and the Gibraltar Health Authority Act regulations which reconfigured the GHA board and separated the functions of the GHA and the Ministry of Health and Care. Following the recent ruling by the Court of Appeal in February of this year, the Government published the Employment (Bullying at Work) (Amendment) Bill 2022, which seeks to address the issues raised. The Government has passed the British Sign Language Act. All this work has been done thanks to our lawyers at the GLO.

The law drafters are currently working on a number of other legislative projects that I have commissioned in my capacity as Minister for Justice, including in relation to a Bill to prohibit vaping for under-18-year-olds, online safety legislation, a Domestic Abuse Bill – having been previously published as a Command Paper – a project on gender neutrality in legislation and conversion therapy ban. I also wish to announce that I will be commencing two important and significant reviews of existing legislation: a review of family law and a review of crimes legislation. The team at the GLO is preparing the groundwork for me so that I can formally proceed to the consultation process. I am also involved in their ongoing work regarding the extension of a number of Council of Europe and United Nations Conventions to Gibraltar. These include the United Nations Conventions on corruption, disabilities, the rights of the child and the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women. I thank the team for all their hard work and advice.

Turning to my responsibilities on safeguarding, as the Minister with responsibility for children and adults safeguarding and regulation, I believe that no child or vulnerable adult should be exposed to harm or left behind. Everyone has the right to feel safe and live in peace. To do so, we need to tackle the social issues that have arisen or have been exacerbated by the pandemic and lead the way for continued changes and improvements to our safeguarding systems. Effective safeguarding requires partnership, collaborating with individuals, professionals and other agencies working together to recognise the potential of preventing harm. Prevention is, therefore, the responsibility of a wide range of agencies, as well as other organisations, charities and groups. It is for this reason that I have reconstituted the function of the Child Protection Committee and established a Safeguarding Adult Board and a Youth Offending Committee, the latter two being the first of their kind in Gibraltar. I must highlight that the purpose of the Child Protection Committee and the Safeguarding Adults Board is to provide a joint forum to allow for a close working relationship between the Care Agency, the RGP, the GHA, the Education Department and other key organisations who share the common aim of protecting children and vulnerable adults at risk and for developing, monitoring and reviewing safeguarding policies. The chairperson of both committees is currently the Chief Executive of the Care Agency, who reports and provides advice to me on safeguarding with respect to the Child Protection Committee and the Safeguarding Adults Board, and I am very grateful for these additional responsibilities that he discharges.

Social care and safeguarding services all around the world have experienced great challenges in providing optimal care and protection to the most vulnerable members of their communities during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Care Agency and all other bodies with safeguarding functions have spent the last two years dealing with the challenges of the pandemic by building innovative

ways to manage risk. This must continue as we move to recover from the consequences of the pandemic, especially since the full impact of COVID is not yet known. In this regard, the Youth Offending Committee has been working towards preparing recommendations which include analysis and conclusion of the main issues that have arisen through their meetings. All the services involved are united to ensure that children are supported and empowered to make the most of their lives, enjoy and achieve and make a positive contribution to the community within Gibraltar, and agree that this requires all involved with the child to tailor their services to the individual child's needs. The committee has identified ways in which progress can be made to ensure a reduction in first-time offenders, a reduction in re-offending and a reduction in the use of custody, especially for first-time offending.

I now turn to the management of sex offenders in the community. This comes under the Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA). There are currently nine trained designated risk managers (DRMs) across the different MAPPA organisations, who undergo yearly specialist training in the assessment and management of risk posed by sex offenders. From the DRMs and representatives of key partner agencies a core team has been formed and the core team received further specialist skills in assessment and interventions with MAPPA cases to ensure effective risk management – a very difficult job to undertaken indeed. The Public Protection Panel comprises members from the MAPPA organisations and is responsible for the identification and implementation of risk management plans for each offender.

Turning my attention to Her Majesty's Prison Service, from a prisoner management perspective 2021 saw the highest daily average of prisoners since 2015 – there were 54, a figure which was adversely affected by the influx of detainees who were unable to be deported for a period because of COVID restrictions. This impact factor is no longer the case and at present the daily average population stands at 38 for the first quarter. The Prison's facilities continue to be well used by those in custody as the year has progressed, with all of these seeing a higher percentage of users. Of these, 32% of the prison population attended educational classes, up from 29%; 91% made use of the gymnasium; and 49% attended vocational classes, up from 22.4%. Counselling is essential in providing support, and the system must maximise its efforts to pick up from the excellent work coming out of the Prison's voluntary drug testing scheme. This currently boasts participation of 67%. The programme will better place offenders on the road to rehabilitation and successful reintegration into society and therefore reduce the rate of reoffending.

Mr Speaker, now turning my attention to the Probation Service, the Probation Service continues to provide services to the courts in terms of pre-sentence reports, and to the Parole Board for consideration of parole. Probation officers continue to supervise and manage those offenders subject to licence conditions and community rehabilitation orders and carry out intervention plans based on the needs of the offender. One of the probation officers also forms part of the Prison Board and undertakes prison inspections. Last year, probation officers underwent training in the Freedom programme as part of the Government's Domestic Abuse Strategy and this programme is now being delivered with perpetrators of domestic abuse as part of their licence conditions or community rehabilitation orders. The Probation Service continues to explore further training on domestic abuse interventions.

I turn now to the final uniformed bodies that I am responsible for, the Fire Services. Starting with the Airport Fire and Rescue Service (AFRS), they have maintained a very busy period of activity. The primary focus throughout the last year has been to consolidate practical training and essential development courses. It has also undergone external reviews to ensure that its personnel, manning and resources are adequate to fulfil its operational response tasks and that these are delivered in accordance with mandated international standards. At the same time, it has reviewed all its processes and operational procedures to ensure that these remain current in the lead up to its 15-month full audit by UK Civil Aviation Authority inspectors.

As integral components of their ongoing competence-based training, AFRS personnel undertook a variety of training and instruction courses which are fundamental elements of their

continual professional development. In addition, senior officers attended an airport fire officers' course in the UK, which was an excellent opportunity for them to work alongside senior officers from across UK airports. The AFRS is an acknowledged and well-respected organisation among UK airport fire services in different aviation fire and rescue forums, so staying in continual touch with these allows it to keep abreast of industry developments and thereby remain relevant.

Last year, the AFRS underwent an overview audit inspection and a series of task resource analysis sessions under the auspices of the Defence Fire Safety Regulator. This entailed both theoretical and practical sessions to formally confirm and document that the AFRS is meeting its mandated incident response requirements with sufficient personnel and firefighting resources. In this respect the AFRS was given a clean bill of health for its operational effectiveness.

The AFRS continues to work closely with the Gibraltar Fire and Rescue Service (GFRS), having a great professional working relationship and collaborating on training and other projects of common benefit to both. The AFRS strives for organisational and individual self-improvement, ensuring that its firefighters maintain the necessary skills and competences which are critical for mitigating risk, enabling safety and allowing them to effectively fulfil their roles. This underpins its strategic operating principles with its team always moving forward in a dynamic cycle of improvement whilst positively responding to the evolving challenges facing fire services.

From the AFRS, I now turn to the GFRS, and for them it has been a year of continued progress and adaptation to new challenges – no different than the rest of the public service and Gibraltar in general as we move out of the pandemic restrictions. With the growing number of developments, amendments to fire safety standards and innovative fire engineering solutions, the GFRS Fire Safety team is constantly challenged and does a magnificent job in the anticipation of risks, subsequently impacting their frontline operational preparedness. The GFRS continues with its primary objective, implementing and adopting measures or procedures necessary to ensure that they maintain competence and provide the best possible level of emergency response to safeguard Gibraltar and its citizens. The GFRS is also very much part, as first responder, of the Gibraltar Domestic Abuse Strategy and they, too, are receiving training.

Finally, turning to the firefighter recruitment selection process, GFRS officers have been working for months to come up with the right formula for the revised firefighter recruit selection process. This new system mirrors the selection process applied by their counterparts in the UK Fire and Rescue Service with a single standard for all applicants and was put to the test last month, leading to the appointment of their newest firefighter recruit. In efforts to adopt full transparency and equal opportunities, video footage capturing all activities is provided through the GFRS website to demonstrate the process and level of fitness required of all candidates. It goes without saying that I have been working very closely with the Chief Fire Officer, in the same way that I have been working with the Commissioner of Police, to try to increase diversity in the number of women who join the force, and the Ministry for Equality is working with both departments in this regard.

During the past two years, most of the GFRS's efforts have been focused around the pandemic and implementing rigorous measures to protect minimum levels of response if faced with virus spread within the department. These were very testing times and scary times indeed, no doubt, for staff, who went the extra mile to ensure that Gibraltar could still count on an efficient emergency response. I must thank all those in the essential services and uniformed bodies that I am responsible for, as they are the ones who run towards danger in order to keep the rest of us safe.

In the recent reshuffle I was given the additional responsibilities of public regulation, regulations generally and town planning, so I now turn my attention to my responsibilities for Town Planning and Building Control. I wish to start by reminding this House of the Government's commitment to the Development Plan. The Government recognises the importance of having an up-to-date development plan in place. This is important for a strategic approach to our development. I hope to make further announcements on this once the tender process has been completed.

On the day to day, the volume of applications dealt with by the Department continues at the high levels of past years, with a total of 961 applications across all application types between 1st January and 31st May 2022. Probably one of the largest and most complex applications that the Department has dealt with has been the recent application in respect of the Eastside. In 2021 the Development and Planning Commission (DPC) held a total of 11 meetings, whilst so far this year there have been six meetings. Additionally, the DPC's subcommittee meets regularly to determine minor applications, which greatly helps to speed up the decision-making process for more minor applications. There were 27 meetings of the subcommittee last year and 12, so far, this year. DPC meetings have continued to be held remotely via video conferencing. The meetings have also continued to be live streamed on the Government's YouTube channel. I will ensure that public access to planning applications and the decision-making process continues with the transparency that we have been enjoying over the last 10 years, and I shall strive to improve on this accessibility and transparency, if at all necessary and possible.

The Department continues with its work to develop and improve the e-planning service, which allows for easy access to application details for the public and provides a platform through which applicants can submit their applications. I am pleased to say how successful this function of e-government is, and almost 98% of planning and building control applications submitted in the period 1st January to 31st May were submitted via this portal. My Department is also undertaking an exercise to review the current building regulations and various building codes with a view to bringing them in line with the latest standards. Finally, we will be having a new workstream that will be a collaboration between Town Planning and Building Control and the Ministry for Equality with a view to taking a more holistic view and making Gibraltar more accessible to people with disabilities.

On regulation, the Gibraltar Regulatory Authority (GRA) has, again, managed to remain fully operational during another challenging year, efficiently continuing to respond to public concerns and to enhance its awareness-raising initiatives. Testament to the GRA's ability to remain flexible was its successful hosting of a virtual European case handling workshop in 2021, an annual feature in the calendar of European data protection authorities and typically an in-person event. This workshop provides a platform for international co-operation and focuses on the practical implementation of data protection on a day-to-day basis. This year has also seen the GRA win an international Global Privacy Assembly award for its awareness-raising initiatives undertaken regarding its education and public awareness work. Congratulations to them, Mr Speaker. Furthermore, the GRA continues to proactively publish guidance notes and organise data protection workshops intended to promote collaboration and debate and to provide an open forum whereby organisations can discuss data protection law and best practice – a very difficult field to navigate, no doubt.

Turning to the Office of Fair Trading (OFT), my predecessor in this respect spoke yesterday about the work of the OFT. I thank my good friend Minister Daryanani for his dynamic work and progress in this respect. I know that it was his intention to drive further progress and build on the work that we had already done. In addition to the Department's responsibilities that he outlined, I will mention the OFT's anti-money laundering and counter-terrorism financing regulatory role for the real estate agent and high value goods sectors as this continues to mature with the implementation of new procedures and ongoing supervisory programmes. The team is currently conducting a round of on-site visits to businesses in these sectors on a risk-based approach. Of the 13 visits carried out since November 2021, the OFT has issued five fines to local business. In this past year, the team has also carried out significant outreach to these sectors to support businesses to achieve compliance. This has included hosting virtual training opportunities with the assistance of the Gibraltar Financial Intelligence Unit.

I can confirm that the Government continues to work with the OFT on the Fair Trading Bill with the aim of producing a more appropriate and mature framework within which the OFT can operate, again building on the work that was previously done. This Bill will make the establishment of new businesses easier and quicker by simplifying the business licensing process. This will,

therefore, drastically improve further the manner in which the OFT can provide its services to the public. At the same time, the new Bill will protect consumers in Gibraltar and allow the OFT to set trading standards. Having recently taken on this role, I am already working on this aspect. Given that this is a such a big and important piece of work, consultation is key and I am committed to
 405 continue to engage with the Gibraltar Federation of Small Businesses and the Chamber of Commerce to ensure that we will support the business community in Gibraltar in the same way as my friend Minister Daryanani did.

Finally on regulation, there are two major innovations in the pipeline. The first, of course, as we heard from the Chief Minister, is the introduction of the Anti-Corruption Authority. I have given
 410 this work priority as soon as the COVID pressures have permitted. There is a draft Bill in final form and it is going through the final stages of internal approval. It is my hope to be able to publish it as soon as possible in the coming weeks.

A very interesting new piece of work that I have now embarked upon is the regulation of quality of care. I have already met with the Chair of the Medical Registration Board and the Chair of the
 415 Nurses and Midwives Registration Board to consult on their views on the most appropriate way forward. The new structure will also make provision, importantly, for quality of care inspections of providers. I am very excited about this innovative piece of work and I shall make more detailed announcements after the summer.

And now, finally, Mr Speaker, turning to my portfolio as Minister for Equality. During this
 420 administration's three terms of office it has been my privilege to have held various portfolios. Of all of those portfolios, the Equality portfolio has been the one that I have held from the very first day. It was a great honour to be chosen as Gibraltar's first Minister for Equality in 2011 and it is a responsibility that I have always been, and continue to be, very proud of. As Minister for Equality, I lead the Ministry for Equality, a Department which our administration has created and which is
 425 dedicated to upholding equality principles and eliminating all forms of discrimination. While it is a sad reflection that equality matters were given little, if any, political or parliamentary consideration until 2011, I have to say that it has been incredibly rewarding to have been at the helm of a Department which has been innovative in its philosophy, vision, policies and, of course, most importantly, legislation.

On LGBTQ+, as the month of June draws to an end today, this being Pride month I think it fitting
 430 to begin with LGBTQ+ rights, no less because in the 11 years since the inception of the Department of Equality we have made such huge strides to ensure that gay rights are properly protected by legislation and that through our awareness campaigns and community engagement these are understood and embraced. The development of LGBTQ+ rights since we have been in office has
 435 been nothing short of remarkable and I feel that this was symbolised most recently with the very successful Pride celebration event last Saturday. Although this was not the first Pride celebration in Gibraltar – and, incidentally, I also attended the one that was organised in 2014 and that one was also successful for its time – this year's was different as it reflected that we have progressed even further in the eight years since the first one. I must congratulate the LGBTQ+ committee,
 440 which organised this year's event so marvellously. Looking back now it is hard to believe that the first time the word 'gay' was mentioned in Parliament was in my very first Budget speech in 2012 and that the first time, regrettably, (*Interjection*) that gay rights were first properly achieved in this Parliament was in 2014.

The Civil Partnership Bill, which was the first Bill I ever moved in this Parliament, was a
 445 landmark piece of legislation. For the first time in Gibraltar's history this Bill enabled the formal recognition of relationships between couples of the same sex. Two years later, in 2016, I brought the Civil Marriage (Amendment) Act to this House to allow for the civil marriage of gay couples as well. Further to this, we have legislated to outlaw homophobic hate crime and hate speech, and such crimes are now, thanks to us, aggravated offences. In July 2015, and in recognition of our
 450 transgender community, we made provision to extend protection from discrimination for individuals who have undergone gender reassignment. The passing of all this legislation has

marked a hugely significant change in values and demonstrated our commitment to equal rights for all members of our community, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender reassignment.

455 Legislation is hugely important in ensuring that everyone can enjoy the same rights, but legislation alone cannot immediately bring about cultural change. What we do is sometimes controversial. For example, last year we installed stencils to some traffic lights to depict LGBTQ+ images. It was a real conversation starter and I am glad that it gave people the opportunity to discuss and see why such visual representation is important to them. I am glad that it provided a platform for discussion and debate, and for this reason, whereas the traffic lights were initially
460 intended to only be installed for the month of Pride, the whole Cabinet agreed that they should be kept indefinitely. It really does make me smile every time I cross the pelican crossing here at Line Wall, and especially this week when I have been coming to Parliament and I see the traffic lights. I have also heard many tourists comment very favourably when they see our traffic lights. Again, another small, but important step that I am glad we took. This is why we continue to raise awareness of LGBTQ+ matters, and for this reason we are committed to listening to the voices and concerns of the LGBTQ+ community. This was our motivation for launching Gibraltar's first LGBTQ+ survey to coincide with Pride month last year. Hearing directly from stakeholders is essential in progressive democracies and I am happy to report that there was an enthusiastic response to the survey, which was open for a period of three months. A total of 196 responses
470 were collected and the information collated will allow my team to glean insights into the experiences of members of the community locally and act on them accordingly. The survey findings in full, plus a report prepared by the Ministry for Equality on its findings will be published as soon as it is finalised. These valuable insights will enable us to ensure that any remaining barriers experienced by members of the LGBTQ+ community are swiftly eradicated.

475 While we have ensured that legislation protects members of the LGBTQ+ community we will continue to mark Pride month because there is no place in Gibraltar for homophobia, biphobia or transphobia. **(A Member: Hear, hear.)** We mark Pride now in a very visual way, as awareness is key. We do this by flying the rainbow flag in prominent places throughout Gibraltar, by illuminating the Moorish Castle in rainbow colours, with the installation of the traffic lights and in
480 supporting the Pride parade. We organise this visual representation to send a strong message to anyone who needs to hear it: how incredibly supportive this Government is and that we do not shy away from being so. We will continue to mark Pride month because there is no place in Gibraltar for hate. We will continue to mark Pride month because it is fair and just. In Gibraltar we are all of equal value and we all deserve and are entitled to full respect at all times. We will
485 continue to mark Pride month because it is not right that some people, especially young adults, cannot live true and authentic lives out of fear of rejection by those around them. *(Banging on desks)*

On gender equality, this Government's commitment to equality is truly embedded in everything we do. Gender equality is, of course, another important strand of my equality portfolio
490 and I believe that gender equality is a necessary component of a modern and progressive society and is a vital factor in our pursuit of social justice. A key strand of the Gender Equality Strategy is the economic empowerment of women. Inevitably, the last two years have regrettably had an impact on a lot of the projected initiatives for gender equality, but needless to say we are working extremely hard to catch up. Nevertheless, I am happy to report that one of the key initiatives of
495 the Gender Equality Strategy, the Women's Mentorship Programme, has been able to continue in recent months. We recently completed the third cycle of this programme, and once again the feedback from participants, both mentors and mentees alike, was extremely positive. I am very proud of the Women's Mentorship Programme because its aims are hugely ambitious. In the first instance, the programme helps women to develop personal and professional skills, and in the mid
500 to long term the programme aims to address the underrepresentation of women in positions of leadership and management. We now know that a more gender-balanced workforce is better not only for organisations and businesses, as proven by numerous studies and research, but for national economies too. Therefore, ensuring that we maximise the skills and talents of both men

and women in equal measure is a goal that we can all support and that we can all benefit from.

505 The third cycle of the Women's Mentorship Programme came to a close in March and there was a very positive uptake of the programme. There were 57 participants in the third cycle, bringing the total number of participants, so far, to 175. This means that since the inception of the Women's Mentorship Programme, 89 mentees have been able to access support and advice from established professionals. In case anyone is wondering why the numbers do not add up, this is

510 because some people are repeat mentors. We are very fortunate that some people have been with us through every single cycle and I would like to express my gratitude to them. Because this is such an invaluable opportunity for women, I am delighted to announce that the next cycle of the Women's Mentorship Programme will commence in September. I will make a more detailed announcement on this next week and I would urge and encourage anyone interested in

515 participating in the Women's Mentorship Programme, either as a mentor or mentee, to contact the Ministry for Equality to register for the next cycle.

Finally on gender equality, Mr Speaker, as you know, I was elected Chair of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians Steering Committee of the British Islands and Mediterranean Region. This also gave me a seat on the steering committee of the wider International CWP Committee.

520 Of course, as everything happens at once, I was elected as chair in March 2020, just when the pandemic was starting, so in addition to everything I was doing at the time I had to deliver on this, too. Had I known what was going to happen when I stood for election, maybe I would have considered it before then, but anyway, everything happened and everything was done and everything went well. My tenure came to an end in March this year when we met at CPA in the

525 Isle of Man. One of the objectives of this committee is to encourage more women in Parliament. Another is to support women parliamentarians in discharging their role. I am the only woman in Government and I am one of only two women in this Parliament. This ratio is not good because it means that the gender balance of this Chamber does not reflect the gender diversity in our community, and it should, so I have the pleasure to announce that later this year I will be hosting

530 the Regional Conference of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians of the British Islands and Mediterranean Region, in Gibraltar. One of my motivations for hosting this conference here is that I can arrange for outreach with other colleague Commonwealth women parliamentarians from our region to promote discussion of political life locally and that hopefully this will be one the tools that we use to encourage more women to stand for election at the next opportunity. I

535 hosted a CWP conference here in 2015 and it went extremely well and is still referred to by those who attended. I also hosted the conference last year, albeit virtually. This next conference will be the first in-person conference for a number of years and everyone is looking forward to it.

Mr Speaker, regrettably, this week I am the only woman here. The hon. Lady opposite is unable to be with us because of the sad passing of her mother, Lady Hassan. Understandably, the hon.

540 Lady is going through a difficult time and feels that she cannot be here. I was very saddened yesterday to learn of some online abuse that she received because of this. We are servants of the people and we are in the public eye, but that should not make us fair game for personal insults and abuse – and we get them all too often. We are also human and we cannot be strong all the time. I am sure that the hon. Lady would have wanted to have been here if she could, but

545 regrettably, and for a very sad reason, she feels that she cannot. I ask that people respect this (*Banging on desks*) and allow the hon. Lady to grieve the passing of her mother. My condolences to the hon. Lady and her family once again.

Generally on equality, diversity and inclusion, since we have slowly emerged from lockdown the Ministry for Equality has been able to resume its ongoing training and awareness programmes,

550 and equality continues to be embedded in the awareness that we do. We facilitated bespoke training at the University of Gibraltar for the current PGCE and nursing cohorts. We are also working with the RGP to provide unconscious bias training to officers and staff. In recent years the RGP has taken significant strides in its equality, diversity and inclusion journey as an organisation with the formation of an LGBTQ+ forum, a Muslim officers' forum and the Women in Policing

555 Network. This training on unconscious bias will be a vital opportunity to further embed equality, diversity and inclusion principles at an individual and strategic level.

Another key point to address is domestic abuse, and that is one of the things that is at the forefront of my equality agenda. Eradicating domestic abuse is a top priority for us and so much work has been done. As Minister for Justice and as Minister for Equality, I am only too aware that
 560 effecting legislative changes which will strengthen responses from key agencies is crucial in addressing domestic abuse. For this reason, I published a Command Paper for a Bill specifically dedicated to offences relating to domestic abuse. This landmark, standalone and consolidated piece of legislation seeks to enshrine in law the protection of victims of domestic abuse. However, since that was published, further representations have been received on the Command Paper.
 565 Changes that have been suggested are significant and they are being made to the draft to ensure that the concerns raised have been dealt with. The Bill will be redrafted and finalised and we will ensure that coercive and controlling behaviour is criminalised, and introduce domestic abuse protection notices and orders. These notices and orders will afford the courts and the RGP new tools with which to address and target domestic abuse, as they prohibit abuse and may prohibit
 570 contact or stop the perpetrator going within a certain distance of a victim's home. This will send a very powerful message to the perpetrators and the wider community that this Government is committed to eliminating this very serious social issue, and I hope that within the next months, and certainly before the end of the year, all the legislative requirements that need to be in place are in place. We will, of course, deliver training and support those with training because this is a
 575 key strategic priority. We have already, in 2020, offered training to all officers of the RGP – 250 of them – and this was commissioned from a specialist charity called Saving Lives. In addition to this, the Ministry for Equality commissioned very successful training on the Freedom programme, which is a therapeutic intervention for victims and perpetrators of domestic abuse, as well as their children. It is a very successful strategy, I am told.

580 Turning to disability, this brings me to speak about another landmark equality achievement in the progress that we have made. In my last Budget speech I mentioned how COVID had put a stop to a lot of our plans. This year has seen a resurgence in our efforts to make sure that we are back on track. Basically, we have to do double the work in half the time, but we are committed to doing so.

585 Setting our work in context, it was after much preparation in 2017 that we passed the Disability Act, the fundamental purpose of which is, of course, to promote and protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of fundamental rights and freedoms of people with disabilities. Even the Chamber of Commerce at the time described it as one of the most significant pieces of legislation that our Government had introduced. Of course, this progress had been previously overlooked by
 590 those opposite, who, although now attempting to rewrite history in this respect, in reality did little to nothing in the furtherance of the rights of people with disabilities. The passing of that legislation was always intended to be the first step to Gibraltar requesting that the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities be extended to Gibraltar. Quite unlike the transposition of an EU Directive – in the good old days but no longer – having Conventions extended to us is
 595 something that we do via the United Kingdom and it can be a long and complicated process with various stages and audits along the way. But as you heard the Chief Minister say on Tuesday, this process has already begun. I have already met with the Government's legal team and their work has started. They will be working closely with my team at the Ministry for Equality to progress it. They all received the memo from me that this must be a priority and I want this to be progressed
 600 as quickly as possible. In order to be able to progress on the extension of the Convention, we need to step up the standard once again. A tremendous amount of work is required on this journey, but what matters is that the work has already commenced and my Equality and Justice teams will be working together to deliver.

Returning to the Disability Act, when it was passed in 2017 there were two sections that were
 605 not in force. These are the sections that require that all buildings be made accessible. Immediately after the passing of the Act we passed the Part R Building Regulations. This means that, since then,

all new builds or modifications are required to meet the accessible standards. Sections 13 and 14, however, relate to existing buildings and these provisions were paused in order for those responsible for buildings to have sufficient time to prepare and phase it in. We did this in full
610 consultation and agreement with the Disability Society at the time. It was for this reason that in 2019 the Chief Minister announced tax relief for businesses that adapted and made modifications to their existing premises – regrettably, another initiative that became a victim of COVID and slowed down the progress that we wished to make, and as such inevitably delayed the coming into force of these sections. For this reason the Chief Minister announced that he would once
615 again make this tax relief possible and available for a further two years. I can announce that it is our intention to trigger those provisions after the end of that period and bring them into force – indeed, bring them into force in the lifetime of this Parliament. Therefore, the Ministry for Equality will shortly be launching an information campaign on what these obligations will entail and will offer guidance in their usual helpful way. We will also offer training so that everyone is aware of their responsibilities and what is expected of them as best practice, as we want to support
620 everyone in getting it right.

Of course, the work on the Convention also goes hand in hand with the Government’s Disability Strategy, and this essentially provides our roadmap for the journey. The Ministry for Equality is responsible for the strategy and its delivery and spearheads it and has been doing so for the past
625 10 years. All the improvements that we have seen throughout our term in office are due to this. But we are stepping this up, too, and I would like to publish a multi-agency national strategy, very much like the Gibraltar National Mental Health Strategy that I commissioned last year, and I would like for this to be published by the end of this year. That means that there will be a lot of strategic activity in this regard in the coming months and there will, of course, be stakeholder consultation.

I have already also commissioned refresher training on the Disability Act for the public sector, as there will have been changes at senior management level since the last one. This will be rolled out in September and will be a reminder to all Departments of their responsibilities for having disability policies to promote inclusion and comply with their obligations under the Act. The Ministry for Equality will assist in revising their policies, if necessary. As this work will be
630 undertaken by my team, there will be consistency of standard across the board. There will also be other training programmes offered and these will be sector focused so that we can properly target for maximum effectiveness.

One of the important strands of our Government’s Disability Strategy and the first thing the Ministry for Equality did when the restraints of COVID were lifted was to restart the disability customer care training on language and etiquette that we had halted a year or so earlier. This training now forms part of the Government’s Human Resources Department training prospectus. To date, 270 public servants have received this training. The next session, in July, will see another class and this figure will go up even more. Further efforts have been made to ensure that this training is available to other sectors as well, including the private sector. The Department of
640 Equality is currently liaising with the Gibraltar Sports and Leisure Authority and the Care Agency to make arrangements to facilitate training for them as well.

Interaction between the general public, representative bodies and Government bodies is another important strand of our Disability Strategy. As with training and awareness, this is a strand that needs to be nurtured and developed continuously if we are to develop the services Gibraltar
650 deserves. I am happy to say that this is something the Ministry for Equality does very well, and this can be shown by the work they have done this last year. The Ministry for Equality was there to advise on the introduction of a WhatsApp service available to people with hearing difficulties who needed to contact the GHA’s 111 service for either the COVID helpline or the Mental Health Crisis Pathway. Also in conjunction with the GHA and Public Health, the Ministry for Equality joined
655 the Gibraltar Hearing Issues and Tinnitus Association (GHITA) in the campaign on hearing loss prevention during Deaf Awareness Week. The Government has also seen the implementation, this year, of sign video services, originally introduced in the GHA in 2014 and now available across most, if not all, public departments. This now makes British Sign Language interpretation available

instantly to any Department or agency that may need this service in order to communicate with members of the public. And while we are on the subject, let us not forget that this House has recently passed the British Sign Language Act, recognising British Sign Language as a language in Gibraltar.

The Ministry for Equality has, for years, been in close contact with the Ministry of Environment and the Gibraltar Sports and Leisure Authority (GSLA) in their development of accessible services at our beaches and pools. This year is no different. You will, no doubt, be aware, Mr Speaker, that when Government inherited the Europa pool complex the facilities were not ideally suited for people with disabilities. There have been numerous improvements and we made an announcement in this respect recently, and I would like to thank both the GSLA and the Ministry for Environment for their dedication and awareness this past year and in previous years. I think I can confidently say that Gibraltar probably has some of the most accessible beaches in Europe, (**A Member:** Hear, hear.) and while, of course, I am not going to pretend our services are perfect, the Ministry for Equality and other Government Departments that allow for improvement of the services every year will continue to work together in furtherance of the Government's Disability Strategy. I am sure that if improvements are required going forward, they will be identified and provided for.

The Ministry for Equality is the central co-ordinating Government Department on disability and is very much involved in an advisory role with numerous committees like the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment Panel mainly led by the Department of Education and the Traffic Commission, and is also a consultee to Town Planning and Building Control on new applications. It is right for this to be the case.

On another note, I am really excited about our partnership with Special Olympics. One of our joint initiatives is the Special Olympics Healthy Athletes Programme and this Government hopes to emulate this in Gibraltar. This House may remember a meeting that was held last March between the Government – including the Chief Minister – Special Olympics Gibraltar and Mr David Envangelista, the President and Managing Director of Special Olympics Europe Eurasia and Senior Adviser for International Development at Special Olympics. The Healthy Athletes Programme is a programme developed by Special Olympics – who are very much the specialists in the field of learning disabilities – and designed to facilitate various health check-ups for athletes with learning disabilities and, importantly, provide the necessary training to the medical practitioners who see them. This programme is already used extensively around the world by Special Olympics at both national and world games and has proved incredibly successful in highlighting health issues that athletes may have. Anecdotally, because of the issues that people with learning disabilities may have, and their limitations on communication, this can have an impact on their health, and the screening programme is obviously a preventative measure and has proved to be very effective. Whereas this programme was originally aimed at athletes attending the games, the desire of Special Olympics globally is for this initiative to be used in communities and across the board for anyone who may need it. This is why, having only just returned from Berlin for this purpose, to learn about this programme, I cannot wait to put it into action.

At this juncture I would really love to recognise and thank Mrs Annie Risso MBE for her sterling and selfless work on the progress of Special Olympics in Gibraltar. Her dedication to Special Olympics athletes and the movement is incredible, and every time I travel with her she is so established in the world of Special Olympics that everybody knows who Annie is. She truly needs to be recognised for the progress she has made in this regard. (*Banging on desks*) Thanks to her for opening the doors for us to access this programme and the training thereupon. It will have a very positive effect on us locally and this will form part of the health equality strand of the Government's Disability Strategy.

Finally, Mr Speaker, earlier I spoke about our LGBTQ+ survey, consulting with stakeholders and the results and report I am about to publish, but this is not the only survey that has been undertaken by the Ministry for Equality. You may remember that a disability survey was also launched in October 2021 and it ran until 31st January this year. This information has been collated

and a report is currently being compiled for me by the Ministry for Equality, and this will also be published once complete. I am sure that its contents will make for interesting reading and will be of exceptional value to our Government's Disability Strategy.

715 I have to really commend the small but extremely effective and efficient team at the Ministry for Equality. They really are committed, full of ideas and wanting to make progress at every single opportunity, and I thank them for all the work that they do. In wrapping up, I would like to thank absolutely everyone I have worked with during this year who has supported and advised me, in particular those who work closely with me in my office – Craig, Leyton, Nyreen and Ian – and, of course, Mr Speaker, you and your staff in Parliament for supporting us, too. And it goes without
720 saying my ministerial colleagues – we work very closely together as Government Ministers, we are always there to support each other and we can count on each other's support in Government for a long time to come.

Thank you, Mr Speaker, for your indulgence. *(Banging on desks)*

**Procedural –
Mr Speaker's previous ruling on Points of Order**

725 **Mr Speaker:** I need to just refer back to an issue which arose early on, when the Hon. Roy Clinton wished to correct something which had been said by the Hon. Minister. He asked for the Hon. Minister to give way and I said that I could not force the Hon. Minister to give way.

I have had a look at a ruling which I made last year in relation to the raising of Points of Order, where I said, referring to the Speaker of the House of Commons:

The Speaker of the House of Commons allows the use of Points of Order to effect factual correction of a Member's statement.

I said this will be permitted in this House.

730 The Hon. Roy Clinton did not rise to make a Point of Order, so that did not kick in, but I am advising everyone here, all Members of the House, that this is open to them.

I have since spoken to the Hon. Roy Clinton and he mentioned that it was a matter that had been spoken of by the Hon. Minister which he wanted to correct. The event has now passed and therefore I cannot allow the Hon. Roy Clinton to make a Point of Order, but I wanted to remind
735 everybody that the Rules are there to be used sensibly and correctly.

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Mr Speaker – if I may – thank you very much, I think it is very useful to be reminded of that. Can I also remind hon. Members – and you will know this as much as I, and other Members who have been around as long as I have – that in this debate, the Budget
740 debate, the normal course of business has been that we do not seek that Members give way because every Member, traditionally, speaks and therefore every Member has the opportunity to put their points and Members of the team, also Members of the Opposition team, will have an ability to speak. In fact, we will be hearing from the hon. the sweeper of the Opposition later on, who will be allegedly sweeping up for all other Members, and I will be replying for the
745 Government, of course, and so where we have taken issue with many of the things, where we feel exactly the same way as Mr Clinton may have felt, we will be dealing with those points in the course of my reply. But thank you, Mr Speaker, I think that is a very helpful indication from you.

750 **Hon. K Azopardi:** Mr Speaker, just on that point, I agree with the Hon. the Chief Minister that that certainly has been the practice, but I heard Mr Speaker's ruling and I thought Mr Speaker was raising a quite different issue, which is that there might arise, during the course of the debate, something which has been asserted as a matter of fact which a Member, across the floor, might

want to correct on a Point of Order, and that opportunity arises as Mr Speaker has said, and I think it is quite a different issue to what the Chief Minister has been saying.

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Hon. Chief Minister: Mr Speaker, I agree as much as I disagree with the Hon. the Leader of the Opposition, because in this debate we might all see facts in a different way and if we start to assert that facts are what we are presenting during the course of a Point of Order – which are not actually facts but they are subjective views about facts, not objective positions where would could not have an argument even if we tried – then the debate is not going to progress in the way that the traditional Budget debate has progressed. I agree as much as I disagree with the Leader of the Opposition and I am sure that we will both agree that you will know how to balance, in your discretion, how to deal with those points even in the course of this debate.

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Hon. K Azopardi: Mr Speaker, a final word, because I do not think the Chief Minister has the right of reply in particular, but can I just say I agree with that, of course, but what arose – and without getting into it – is whether something happened or did not happen, and that objectively can be justified one way or the other. I would have thought there was a significant difference.

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Hon. Chief Minister: Mr Speaker, with respect to the hon. Gentleman, whether something happened or did not happen is a matter of fact. Whether it can be justified in a particular way or another is not a matter of fact, it is a matter of opinion, and therefore it is very clear that the facts asserted by the hon. Lady are the facts, full stop. That there are other surrounding facts and circumstances, that there might be opinions as to how things arose or did not arise – well, all of those things, Mr Speaker, are not facts, and your ruling – I do not recall the exact wording to repeat it, but I recall the use of the word ‘fact’ in it – I think is what will be, no doubt, the determining factor for you.

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Mr Speaker: When a Member rises to make a point of order it has to be a serious point backed up by facts. That is the important thing.

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Hon. R M Clinton: Absolutely.

Mr Speaker: Thank you.

**Appropriation Bill 2022 –
Second Reading –
Debate continued**

785

Mr Speaker: The Hon. Elliott Phillips.

Hon. E J Phillips: ... *[Inaudible]* and not burdening the public purse with those tickets. I think that corrects the record insofar as the suggestion. I am sure the hon. Lady was not trying to mislead the House in relation to that point, but that corrects the factual basis for the purchase and our contribution to those tickets.

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Mr Speaker, this is my seventh Budget and sixth contribution to the debate on the Appropriation Bill. Before I get to the substance of my address, I echo the thanks expressed by Members of this House in relation to your team here in Parliament for the work they do all year round to support Members – *(Interjection by Hon. Chief Minister)* Mr Speaker, of course the hon. Gentleman, the Chief Minister, wishes to interrupt me daily, on every single subject. We will let him have his reply eventually, but what I would say is we thank you all for the support that you have offered Members of this House irrespective of the side they sit on.

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Our civil servants in this place go about their daily obligations without fear or favour and they are a credit to the service. In my interactions with your staff, Mr Speaker, their response time has always been excellent and I appreciate their guidance. The parliamentary team is placed in a difficult spot, not because of the job but because of the way in which the Government conducts itself in managing the parliamentary diary with very little notice to you or your staff, not to mention the elected Members on this side of this House. *(Interjection by Hon. Chief Minister)* Whilst it is appreciated that urgent and emergency-type Government business may – rarely – upset things, the Government must make sure that the House works for all Members of Parliament, so that you can provide, and we can provide, a better service to the public. I have not been shy in saying this in this House and I have not been shy in saying that this House does not work as it should and is in desperate need of reform.

This should be a place for informed debate, collaboration for the good of the community, scrutiny and holding the Government to account. The quality of the answers we have received in this House for many years now from the hon. Gentlemen and Lady across the floor of the House has little regard for accuracy and leads me to the conclusion that this House is an opportunity for the Chief Minister and the Government that he leads to grandstand on every single possible occasion to diminish and suppress the role of the Opposition. We will not be diminished, suppressed or silenced. **(A Member: Hear, hear.)** We will continue to robustly oppose the Government so that the alternative can be put before the House and ultimately before the people at the next General Election.

Yesterday, the Deputy Chief Minister spoke about planned physical changes to improve the functionality and accessibility of this House, and they are welcome, but the elephant in the Chamber is not so much the physical changes but a deeper introspection as to how we improve the quality of the work that we do in this Chamber. People hold this institution in high regard but there are some fundamental issues which must be tackled so that the quality of our democracy can be enhanced. I am personally disappointed that the Parliamentary Reform Select Committee has not met, despite it being established many years ago.

The last two years have been difficult and challenging years for our community. We have had continued uncertainty as to our place in the world post Brexit, and whilst its negotiators endlessly pick through the detail of the deal it is important to understand that continued uncertainty is causing serious anxiety within our community about our future and our relationship with the European Union – and, indeed, others. Coupled with the pandemic, we have all had it tough. Our citizens have had their liberties restricted and 104 of our men and women have lost their lives to COVID, whilst many thousands of people have had their physical and mental health impacted from being locked down. Our people needed and continue to need our support during this period. We, as a community, did what we did to protect our GHA and the lives of many more that arguably would have been lost if we did nothing. Our thoughts and prayers are with those who have lost loved ones, those who are afflicted with long COVID and our healthcare warriors who continue to attempt to manage a virus that will no doubt live with us long into the future. At this point, I wish the Hon. the Father of the House, Sir Joe Bossano, a speedy recovery.

We should also spare a thought for the many people in our community who have struggled to access basic appointments, treatments and operations during this time and what many within and outside the GHA are describing as a healthcare service on its knees. If COVID has taught us anything it is that life changes at the blink of eye and, whilst we must be thankful for what we have, we must at all costs protect those who need our support the most. We may not be the largest or most powerful country in the world but we have each other, and whilst this Chamber is a place for heated debate and vocal argument, it has shown that when the chips are down we are able to unite and defend our way of life, be that a challenge to our status, our economy or our health security.

What the last two years has also done is expose our vulnerability and our weaknesses. The last two years have shone a floodlight on areas which are creaking under the pressure of expectation and need. One such area is the crisis in healthcare which my colleagues and I have been talking

850 about for some time. As Shadow Minister for Health, I have observed that health security, public health and our GHA have been put under the spotlight in two ways: first, in how the GHA came together to respond to the COVID emergency; and second, how it has been able to emerge from the pandemic in the Reset, Restart and Recover strategy deployed by the Government.

855 Governments across the world are learning important lessons from COVID. They are learning from the data collected that the state of people's health has a direct correlation as to how they respond to a health crisis and there is much we can do to improve the health of the nation from improving our collective approach to our own health and well-being.

860 The only way, in my view, in getting down the collective weight of our community is by increasing our activity levels, putting healthy eating at the forefront with exercise. This is the only way we can bring down the cost of healthcare and the burden that poor choices can have on the public purse in the long term. The world is moving towards a better understanding of the importance of public health and we need to listen to the experts in this area. I do not believe we do enough in our community to explain the impact that poor dietary choices or a lack of physical activity have on the ability of the GHA to deliver care to the population. Minister Balban's contribution yesterday touched upon improving the nation's health by improving walking and cycling infrastructure. I share his passion, but he appears a lone voice on those benches in relation to their commitment to a green and child-friendly city.

870 As the Minister for Civil Contingencies said in her contribution moments ago, it is clear to all that COVID is here to stay. We must learn to live with the risks associated with COVID and ensure that our community is provided with a Health Service that is fit for purpose, that our healthcare professionals are not demoralised and our people have confidence in the leadership at the GHA and that confidence translates into a decent Health Service being provided to our community.

875 Mr Speaker, as I said, I am responsible for the Health, Transport and Environment – amongst others – portfolios. The one portfolio that has eclipsed all others in respect of public complaint and engagement is Health and it is one that will dominate my address to the House in this Budget, alongside Transport and the Environment.

880 In order to understand the draft Estimates it is important to reflect on the 30th November 2021 statement by the now former Health Minister. That statement was supposed to revolutionise healthcare in Gibraltar. Well before the 30th November 2021 statement, the Opposition regularly raised serious concerns about the Government's inability to provide leadership over our Health Service and the provision of a fully functional Health Service to service users and patients. We have long raised many concerns about the operation and effectiveness of the GHA on a range of disciplines, and whilst COVID has had an impact, matters have, of course, become more acute during the GSLP Liberal administration of this service.

885 The present Minister for Health yesterday talked about the world being upside down, but it is easy to blame COVID for the problems in the GHA. As I have been at pains to say, COVID has served to highlight where we are going wrong and the systemic problems that have plagued the GHA for years. It is easy to blame everything on COVID, but the truth is that we know, the healthcare professionals know, the public know, the unions know and the Minister, from his contribution yesterday, knows that the GHA is broken and it has been caused by a decade-long mismanagement of priorities and the wider economy. The moment they publicly acknowledge it, the sooner we can get on and move forward. It is clear from the outpouring of criticism from the public that things must change quickly within the GHA.

895 We, too, have been vocal in our complaints about the Health Service: the lack of dental care for our children, the collapsed PCC appointments system, the telephone line, the face-to-face appointments, cancelled operations, the lack of financial control in relation to procurement, clinical governance, shocking preventable harm and death raised by the former Head of Clinical Governance, the lack of a chief executive and chief financial officer to lead the GHA, the removal of the micro-manager Minister from St Bernard's as a signal that things needed to change, and the tsunami of poor morale within the service leading to industrial strife. We were critical of the

former Minister's supervision of the GHA, and under the Chief Minister's watch our Health Service has spiralled downwards, from internal crisis to internal crisis, with no end in sight.

Never in our history has our Health Service been in such a state of disarray as under the GSLP Liberal Alliance administration of healthcare in Gibraltar. In their time in office we have seen a massive escalation in the cost of the service, we have seen complaints, litigation and claims skyrocket, we have experienced systemic waste and we have heard about shocking, serious concerns about preventable harm and deaths – all on their watch and they know it. This is nothing to be proud of, and this all rests on their shoulders as the guardians of the provision of healthcare. We have heard of normal working families, our elderly and vulnerable not being able to access simple appointments, children left without seeing dentists for three years, a management structure destroyed by years of micromanagement by an incompetent political leadership – and, to add salt into the wounds, now a Budget which promises mass un-co-ordinated and haphazard cuts across the Health Service that will inevitably impact on service levels and basic health in our community.

The 30th November 2021 statement – or the reconfiguration, as described by the former Minister for Health – announced the so-called landmark radical reforms to the GHA in direct response to our comprehensive proposals set out at the last General Election and our public statements reflecting the crisis in healthcare. It is clear that, once again, where we lead on policy, particularly health policy, the Government follows. We, on this side of the House, welcome the wholesale adoption of GSD policy. It was excellent back in 2019 and it is of critical importance now that the GHA has been put under the microscope – not only by us but so very vocally by the patients and public at large.

Back in 2019 we constructed a package of positive, constructive and radical proposals for the reform of healthcare. We proposed an independent professional management team, as well as structural and qualitative changes to improve the quality of care. In particular, we proposed the reintroduction of a CEO at the GHA and the appointment of a CFO to monitor procurement and spending of public money in the GHA. We are pleased to note that all of our proposals have been introduced. Where we lead on health the Government follows.

The GHA has had five Ministers – Ministers Cortes, Balban, Costa, Sacramento and now Minister Isola. Whilst the public watch the ministerial musical chairs at the GHA, our Health Service stumbles from one crisis to another without leadership and with public confidence in the service at an all-time low. We now have a new kid on the Health block – who happens not to be in the Chamber at this time – Minister Isola. Let's hope his head is not next on the block; they are running out of front-bench Ministers to replace him.

The hon. Gentlemen knows that I have a great deal of affection for Mr Isola and respect him, but I have to say that he should stick to what he is known for and what he appears to be fairly good at, namely financial services and digital assets. The hon. Gentlemen is a consummate salesman, he knows how to sell Gibraltar plc outside Gibraltar and I personally commend him for his efforts, but I suspect his silver tongue is not going to come to his aid with the Health Service, and whilst I wish him Godspeed and the best of British, I suspect that deep down he knows he is presiding over a Health Service that is on critical life support.

His contribution yesterday, whilst not earth shattering was, at the top end, *ad lib* before he got to his pre-prepared speech, just the usual defensive jabs, none of which landed on his opponents on this side of the House. I suggest he sticks to non-contact sports. Far from it, all he did was demonstrate that he is able to do the quickest U-turn in political history. It took less than 24 hours after they announced a ridiculous £25-a-week charge affecting all businesses to row back on it. Where in the world does a Government, after supposedly thinking properly about their measures, row back on their commitment within 24 hours? It must be a world record. It is like Line Wall Road all over again. *(Banging on desks)* More of that later. **(A Member: Hear, hear.)**

I do not think that he honestly recognises that – *(Interjection by Hon. Chief Minister)* Mr Speaker, I know the Chief Minister is baiting me. He wants to get to his feet, but he is going to have to wait until I have finished this. I do not think that he did honestly recognise that all is not

well at the GHA and I got the distinct impression that he may be overwhelmed by the prospect of trying to fix the GHA. There were no answers by him – or, indeed, the hon. Lady, who could have answered those questions – in relation to the areas which, on the surface, look like significant cuts to the healthcare budget referred to by the Leader of the Opposition in his contribution. I take the absence of a reply as an acceptance that we will have a task on our hands of managing the Health budget moving to 2023.

They only have themselves to blame and the public know it. We told them last year that the GHA should be regulated by an independent body and pointed to our very carefully designed Care Quality Commission: our idea. It seems clear that they are giving active consideration to this. We told them to hire a CEO – they hired one. We told them to hire a CFO – they hired one. We told them to move the Minister for Health out of the Hospital and they fired her. I am all for constructive politics, but they haven't got a clue when it comes to managing the healthcare budget. They have simply run out of good ideas and brought the GHA to its knees. The only thing I will commend them for today is adopting well-thought-out, prudent and cautious GSD policy.

Whilst they are at it, I would ask them to introduce an integrated healthcare system, an IT system between primary, secondary and tertiary care so that the systems can talk to each other. The failure of digital platforms is totally unacceptable and in 2022 there is no excuse for poor technology in health. The answer to the delivery of better healthcare is to embrace technology and to ensure joined-up IT with all aspects of healthcare, so that when you visit a doctor or go to a pharmacy your health record is accessible by health professionals and you can be provided with the best possible treatment and medication for your ailment.

When it comes to healthcare in our community, the cost to the taxpayer for years 2019-21, namely two years, was a staggering £322 million-odd crudely divided into £161 million each year. The estimate for 2021-22 was £140 million. The forecast outturn for 2022 is £170 million. In short, we spent £170 million up to March 2022 and the estimate for this time next year is £128 million. The Leader of the Opposition has spent much time attempting to demonstrate the overspend and has expertly, in my view, dissected the Chief Minister's contribution and serves to highlight the failure of the Government to get a hold of public spending on healthcare. Putting it simply, we spend half of all revenue generated from Income Tax on the Health Service. The Government has committed on numerous occasions to attempt to cut the cost of health – I remember the Hon. Mr Costa's attempt – but they have been unable to place financial controls and secure efficiencies within the system, and this is why the Hon. Roy Clinton has said that this Budget is irresponsible and unrealistic. Every single Minister for Health – the revolving door, as is well known – has tried and failed to drive efficiencies within the Health Service, and despite what is set out in the Book it is very difficult to see how they are going to stem the crisis in the GHA. Meanwhile, people continue to suffer, and complaints about service rise.

The Government now and again repeats the efficiencies mantra and now proposes to essentially cut the cost of healthcare from the outturn of £170 million to £128 million a year. How are they going to do that? Well, they have no choice. They are going to have to cut services that people rely on. We have already received the pre-Budget announcement of a massive hike in prescription costs to the public and a reduction in those eligible for exemption. We have also learnt that now life-saving and life-improving medication to those who need it will be curtailed. I have spoken with many patients and pharmacists alike and it is clear that patient access to important medicines will now be severely restricted. This is the start of it. What will follow is a period of sustained cuts, cuts and more cuts to our health services. Appendix F on page 225 of the Book provides some insight as to how they will go about butchering our most beloved Health Service.

As we all know, the Health Service is as good as the people who work in it, and it has always been a place where they have been overwhelmed by the demands placed by them by the service. We have excellent healthcare professionals who are trying their best whilst being completely demoralised. We pay, as a community, personal emoluments, which includes salaries, over £60 million a year. In terms of relief cover, visiting consultants and recruitment expenses, we paid

1005 out, in 2021-22, over £15 million. Insofar as those subheads, the Government is now budgeting, for the year ahead, just over £3.4 million, which is a massive cut, which can only impact on the delivery of care in our community. Is this seriously realistic?

1010 Selecting a number of other areas, you can see that it is not just on people where we are seeing cuts but on other areas directly affecting patients. When we look at prescriptions, the Government intends to cut the cost from £12.5 million to £9 million, a whopping £3.5 million from prescriptions. In terms of medical departments they intend to reduce the cost from £18 million-odd to £5.7 million – all this to directly impact on healthcare to our community.

1015 And then we come to the last line of defence in healthcare, our most treasured sponsored patients scheme. Many of our families and Members of this House may have been recipients of healthcare delivered elsewhere because we simply cannot provide that quality of care here. I am sad to report to this House that the Government intends to cut sponsored patients from approximately £15 million to £10 million, representing a significant decrease, in my view.

1020 It is also very disappointing that despite all that is said by them in this House about the importance of support for members of the community with disability and mental health, there is no detailed budget for these areas. We will all remember the publication of the Mental Health Situational Analysis report, which sat on the then Minister for Health's desk for 19 months. That report heavily criticised the Government for not having a defined mental health budget – and low and behold, the report from Public Health England has been ignored once again this year and no mental health budget is properly put forward by them in this year's Budget. It is shocking that in 1025 300 pages there is no mental health budget. They talk about the vulnerable, the weak and those in need with compassion, but it is never backed up. They are all words but no action. How many more young men and women have to needlessly suffer in silence because of a lack of provision in relation to the mental health budget?

1030 All this Budget does is demonstrate that they are entirely disconnected from reality and what is important to this community. Healthcare is our number-one priority and the Government has embarked on a culling and mercenary butchery of the healthcare budget, targeting medicines, staff and the availability of our well-loved sponsored patient scheme. No amount of spin we have heard from the latest in a long line of Ministers or the spin doctor extraordinaire, the Chief Minister himself, will assure the public that what they are doing is ... embarking on a haphazard 1035 scatter-gun approach to cost cutting at the expense of patient care. In respect of the purchase of the Hospital by the Government, we will, obviously, carefully scrutinise the deal when the details are made available to us.

1040 Mr Speaker, I said in 2018 in this very House that the Government had been reckless with the peoples' money. I said in 2018 it took them seven years of spend, spend, spend, which saddled our community with debt, debt and debt. We will now have to live with the consequences of his huge appetite for spending, and that is cuts, cuts and even more cuts. The Chief Minister's chickens have certainly come home to roost, and they seek to blame Brexit and now COVID for their poor planning and mismanagement of the economy.

1045 The two clear characteristics of an economy bruised and battered by a decade of spending are cuts to public services and tax increases, and the Government has now done both. The Chief Minister almost seems proud of the fact that under his watch he needs to take significant revenue-raising measures, albeit for two years – or, to lighten the presentation, 24 months, not that that makes a huge amount of difference, of course.

1050 The Chief Minister tells us that this is not a giveaway Budget – but, Mr Speaker, it is a takeaway Budget. The Chief Minister is taking away from hardworking families who are enduring a cost-of-living crisis and higher interest rates. After a decade of spending he now wants to raid our piggy banks in true Sheriff of Nottingham style. As I have demonstrated, there is less money for medicines needed by patients, less money for sponsored patients and less money for cover, which ultimately has a direct effect on the level of healthcare provided to our community. How can he 1055 be proud of that record? What the Chief Minister cannot get away with is his decade-long splurging of millions at festivals, his Venetian palace, swanky business trips through VVIP World

Leader lounges and a war-like bunker that can only be rivalled by the West Wing, to name but a few. All he can point to is the wonderful green park that the Hon. Mr Isola spent some time discussing yesterday. We all remember the VVIP tickets issued to all and sundry and his friends, and now that he has spent the peoples' money the Chief Minister talks about a nation of fairness and the people's toughest Budget. There is nothing tough about this Budget. The Chief Minister is attempting to position himself as a strong, determined leader who has to take the tough decisions which might not be popular. Well, he would not have had to take those tough decisions in relation to people's money if he had managed the public purse better over the last decade of spending.

I think it was the Deputy Chief Minister who attempted, on Tuesday, to persuade the public that it was a combination of a lethal cocktail of Brexit and COVID that had caused the economic bomb to go off. We do not doubt that Brexit and COVID have had an impact, but to brush aside the Government's addiction to frivolous spending and mismanagement of the public finances will not go unnoticed by the public. Whatever the shape of the treaty, it will be too late for the Chief Minister and his cheerleaders. The Chief Minister's conversion to prudence and the age of responsibility is an act to shield him from a decade of mismanagement and spend, spend, spend. It is a shame he did not listen to the perfect-storm warning set out by the Hon. Mr Feetham all those years ago.

When the hon. Gentlemen sat down in his chair after what he described as the people's Budget, our community literally exploded in anger. Social media went into a frenzied criticism of his speech. The pendulum has truly swung and this is the champagne-swigging socialists' last Budget. (**Two Members:** Hear, hear.) They are bruised and battered, tired and spent, with nothing more to give, clinging to the hope that successes on the treaty will somehow make people forget the domestic nightmare that people have been living with. The community has had enough, they want him gone, and it is only he and the Government who are responsible for the ruinous state of public finances.

He talked at length about rebirth and renaissance. Listening to the Chief Minister was like looking at an entirely different human being. It was not a rebirth, it was not a renaissance; it was a wholesale reincarnation. The Chief Minister is selling himself as Robin Hood but he is the Sheriff of Nottingham. He is, as my learned and hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition said, the highway man: 'Stand and deliver' I think were the words that he used.

We are pleased that he now appears to be counting the pennies, as the Hon. Mr Roy Clinton does on many occasions, but what about those many millions of pounds he spent on parties? Is he accountable for that spending spree? I say 'appears' because even now, when he asks you to dip your hand in your pocket for more tax, electricity and water contributions, he increases his entertainment bill at No.6 Convent Place. In short, while he has gone from drinking Dom Perignon to Prosecco, he still wants you to pay for it. Shame on him. Tell that to the people who can no longer afford medication or obtain the medication they need. Tell that to the people living on the breadline who now have to pay more in tax and utilities. Tell that to the sponsored patients who have just had their budget slashed. Tell that to small business and the unions who have openly and directly criticised this Budget. This is not the people's toughest Budget, it is a desperate scramble Budget to get us through the next year, scrimping around to cover the hole created not by Brexit or COVID but his pathological addiction to spending other people's money. We now rely on the generosity of benefactors to pay for our parks and our theatres. I make no criticism of their generosity, their contribution to our community is welcome, but in one way it is an abdication of responsibility and a reflection of the state of public finances, for which they are ultimately politically responsible.

This Budget demonstrates to all who would care to listen that the Government that he leads has lost the trust and confidence of the people of this community. Our community has lived through a decade of spend, spend, spend and debt, debt and debt, and it now appears that we are all about to board tugboat *Picardo* for a sustained period of collective economic pain. On Tuesday, he romantically talked about himself as being Capt. Picardo of *HMS Gibraltar*, leading us through choppy waters, when the reality is he is readying himself to abandon ship.

Mr Speaker, moving to other areas of responsibility and the Government's now abandoned commitment to a green and child-friendly city, I have heard it being said by the Chief Minister, the Deputy Chief Minister and others in this House that they will not be able to honour the promises they made to the people in 2019. It appears that the green and child-friendly city will be the victim of GSLP mismanagement of our economy. No other Government in a refined democracy has abandoned its commitment to the environment, so why should we? Any political party going to the polls in the future rowing back on its commitment to climate change, for instance, and decarbonisation will be punished by the electorate.

I was surprised to hear from Minister Cortes on Tuesday that several countries have stepped back on low-carbon measures, which the Minister described in his contribution as short term and opportunistic. I would be very interested to hear which countries have stepped back from that commitment, because he simply did not disclose them. There was nothing in his very short, limited, unfocused and, quite frankly, poor five-minute contribution on the environment, apart from wishy-washy commitments to climate change that inspired very little hope to those listening that he was truly interested in improving the environment for the betterment of members of our community. The Minister said that the Government remained fully committed to green Gibraltar, but then confirmed in the same breath that they had to pull back on plans and manifesto commitments. Well, which one is it?

We heard a very limited update from the Minister in relation to their decade-long and hitherto undelivered sewage treatment plant, which appears to be no further forward and in fact is not being provided for in the Book, save for a limited provision. It appears that Gibraltar will continue to pump raw sewage into the sea with no indication as to how much it will cost the public purse and despite saying that it could be ready in a year. Again, is it a realistic timetable for the delivery of this project?

Insofar as solar power, it is clear that there has been very limited progress on rolling this out more widely. It is also clear from Opposition questions in the House that the move to EV is very slow indeed and that businesses have very little encouragement to move their entire fleets to electric. We will continue, therefore, to see fleets of trucks spewing dirty fumes across our streets, and with increased construction our health is going to be further impacted by bad air quality. The Government must do much more to improve our air quality and clean up Gibraltar for all our residents. We will watch with bated breath how the new instruments purchased by the Minister will improve public information about air quality.

We heard about the Sustainable Tourism Tax, which has been described as a positive step, but the Leader of the Opposition and my hon. Friend Mr Bossino said that it is strategically a bad move.

I welcome the prohibited importation of diesel and petrol mopeds from 1st July 2023. Again, it should have happened much earlier. We have been saying this in this House in a number of questions I have put to the Minister, but we are where we are and we are pleased that they are following policy which we have long promoted in this area. Diesel and petrol mopeds are polluting and noisy and the sale is counterintuitive – another example of where we lead on constructive and progressive policies and they follow.

I cannot, of course, not deal with Line Wall Road and the debacle. (**A Member:** Hear, hear.) The other Ministry I am blessed to shadow is Transport, which was quickly taken back by the Hon. Mr Balban after a disastrous term, himself, at Health and after Mr Daryanani's massive U-turn on Line Wall Road. Who will ever forget the appalling mismanagement by the former Minister for Transport, who famously said in this House that Line Wall Road belonged to the Government, only to be corrected by the Leader of the Opposition, who put him right on who owns Line Wall Road – and that is the people, as the learned Leader of the Opposition has said? (*Banging on desks*) They got themselves into a right mess on Line Wall Road and it is the first time I have ever seen the Chief Minister apologise for anything. He held up his hands – 'We got it wrong,' I think were the words he used at the time. We were grateful for that apology, we all get things wrong, but that was cataclysmic. They jump into ideas and they do not think about the consequences for normal working families. By way of example, the closure of Line Wall Road had a massive negative effect

on other important road infrastructure and caused massive and untold chaos. Mr Speaker, I know he does not want to listen to this because it is just so painful for him to listen to his mistake on Line Wall Road, but the mistake cost the taxpayer £300,000. Let that sink in. It is truly embarrassing. The ill-planned, ill-conceived closure of Line Wall Road cost the taxpayer £300,000, an example of carelessness and a waste of public money, and now they are increasing prescription costs and cutting sponsored patients. Where is the priority? They have no idea what they are doing any more. You could not make it up.

During COVID, 2019-22, they spent nearly £2 million on road resurfacing. They estimate to spend £1 million this year on road surfacing. Have you seen the state of our roads? Where are the improvements? Minister Balban spoke in his contribution of patch jobs to our roads. The public are up in arms in relation to transport and the quality of our roads, and rightly so. Mr Balban's speech is not going to appease the many who believe that the STTP was a waste of public money. Addressing that point, in 2019-21 the Government spent nearly £8 million on the tunnel and roads to North Front. The outturn for 2021-22 is £4.1 million. In 2022-23 they expect to spend £4.5 million on the tunnel. That is £16 million on a tunnel and it is not even open.

The infamous Sustainable Traffic, Transport and Parking Plan continues to be an unaccountable money pit. In 2019-21 the taxpayer paid £477,000 for the STTP. In the year 2021-22 it cost a further £205,000 and for 2022-23 it is estimated to reach £800,000. I have said it before that Gibraltar requires a radical shake up in the way we move about our community, but spending millions of pounds on a plan that does not work is not the answer.

Gibraltar can only change if people in our community have confidence in the reliability and availability of public transport. Safe infrastructure for alternatives is essential – and I agree with the hon. Gentleman Minister Balban in relation to that – to move our people away from car use to more sustainable modes of transportation. Yesterday, the Hon. Minister Balban romanticised about his desire for walking and cycling infrastructure and I applaud and support his commitment to this, but it is not backed up by the Members who sit opposite with him. It is clear that his predecessor was certainly not on board with that vision, which I agree is a good one and we applaud him for it, one which sees our people walking more, cycling more and embracing sustainable and healthier modes of transport. I really do think that the only way the Minister will see his vision put into practice is when we shortly move from these benches over to there, where we will do that very thing. Mr Balban is a lone voice on that side of the House but we support his vision.

In relation to e-scooters, there is no real indication as to when proposed legislation will be brought before the House. We need an integrated plan that provides public confidence and allows people to explore safe and cleaner modes of transportation. We also need to encourage a full transition to EV and we require our infrastructure to be significantly upgraded to meet the green and child-friendly commitments set out in their glossy 2019 manifesto. One example is our taxi service, which should be entirely electric, in my view, and we should encourage that transition as soon as possible. Gibraltar deserves better than a half-baked traffic plan that is costing the public millions.

Gibraltar's streets and highways are unsightly and dirty, and whilst millions go out of the Improvement and Development Fund nothing is improved or developed by the GSLP Liberal Alliance. Whilst they have enjoyed a decade of spending and decadence, they have not seen the decade of decay on our highways and byways. It is important to remark on the following, so the public know, Mr Speaker. We spend over £6 million a year for the cleaning of our streets and public spaces. We pay £½ million a year to monitor air quality. We spend £1.85 million on the Environmental Agency contract. We spend £1.25 million on Alameda Gardens. We spend £100,000 a year on keeping our cemeteries. In most, if not all of those areas, I receive complaints from the public. If it is not our dirty streets, if it is not our exceptionally bad air quality affecting the long-term health of our young and old alike, it is the poor state of where our relatives are placed at rest. Where is the supervision? Where is the quality control? Where are the efficiencies, ensuring that we are getting value for money? All the public can see from this Book is the

Government spending their money with no real improvements in our environment and, worse still, a deterioration in the way our community looks.

1215 Our air quality is diabolical and anyone who suggests that we do not have a problem that is directly impacting on the lungs of our children is blind to reality. I am shocked by reports from doctors on the levels of asthma and other respiratory conditions as well as the prevalence of allergens. More must be done, and quickly, to stop the increasing bad and poor air quality in our city. I am not confident that the current Minister has the ambition to drive real change in this area.

1220 No one in their right mind believes that this community is well within the 2021 limits imposed by the World Health Organization and that we have no problem with air quality. The hon. Gentleman, the Minister for the Environment, paints a rosy picture but it is very far from rosy. In fact, the Hon. Professor's contribution yesterday was completely at odds with that of the Hon. Mr Balban. Don't they speak to each other? Don't they compare notes before they draft their speeches? Should

1225 Transport, Health and Environment be joined up with one message?

The fact that the Government has changed its air quality monitors demonstrates that the 20-year-old equipment was not fit for purpose in the first place and they now accept the longstanding concerns of NGOs as to our poor air quality. Pausing there, we should thank and applaud our health, disability and environmental charities, NGOs and associations for the excellent work they

1230 do in raising awareness and funds for their causes. We should thank every organiser and tin shaker for their efforts in ensuring that their health, disability and environmental concerns are raised loud and clear.

Mr Speaker, coming to the end, I wanted to say something about the contributions of the Chief Minister and Mr Bossino yesterday in relation to another country's approach to the question of

1235 abortion. The Chief Minister talked about not having a reverse gear on rights and Mr Bossino I think talked about the belligerent left. Old wounds which were settled in the referendum and the subsequent commencement of the Act should not be reopened. We, in this community, were torn apart by this question and let us not continue to create ill feeling. Let our community continue to heal the wounds of these divisions and attempt to live together in peace and harmony with the

1240 collective decisions we have made about a seminal issue such as abortion despite the many views that have been expressed.

Before I close my contribution, a word about yesterday's news in relation to the end of reciprocal healthcare benefits. We have consistently said that the Government has mishandled the negotiations by giving away rights to frontier workers with no equivalent rights in return for

1245 our people. People will now need to be concerned with taking out health insurance for Spain to cover emergency health cover there. I think the end note in relation to that point is that we should have been much more prepared for the situation, and I am sure the Chief Minister will deal with that in his reply but it is a significant move that was announced yesterday and which the Opposition has replied to in a press release today.

1250 Mr Speaker, it is clear to all that after a decade of spending and a decade of decay, to use a Shakespearean theme, something is rotten in the state of Denmark and there is a real need for a change of direction. We need a Government that delivers what it says it will deliver, a Government that can be trusted with the public affairs and finances of the community and a Government that puts the health of our country first.

1255 Thank you. *(Banging on desks)*

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Mr Speaker, thank you very much.

After that contribution, which has no doubt been inspired by *Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds*, frankly, I wonder whether we might recess for 15 minutes before we hear the sweeper of the

1260 Opposition.

Mr Speaker: The House will now recess for 15 minutes and will return at five to seven.

The House recessed at 6.39 p.m. and resumed at 7.04 p.m.

**Appropriation Bill 2022 –
Second Reading –
Debate continued**

Mr Speaker: The Hon. Daniel Feetham.

1265 **Hon. D A Feetham:** Mr Speaker, it is now five past seven, not quite the graveyard shift that it has been in the past – (*Interjection and laughter*) well, not quite – but I am conscious that hon. Members have been in the Chamber for three consecutive days. As Zsa Gabor would say to her nine husbands prior to contracting marriage, ‘I shall not keep you long, darling,’ therefore keeping my intervention short.

1270

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): The best news for everybody.

Hon. D A Feetham: Indeed, very good news.

1275 Mr Speaker, I wish to start by congratulating the Hon. the Leader of the Opposition on his articulate exposure of the Government’s responsibility for the state of the public finances and indeed for the austerity measures announced by the Government on Tuesday. Yes, Mr Speaker, austerity measures, described by Unite the Union as a Budget hitting workers in the midst of a mounting cost-of-living crisis; austerity that, with the normalness that belied his 60 years of age, the Minister for Financial Services, within 24 hours of the Government announcing those
1280 measures, came to this House and performed the most remarkable U-turn. Nonetheless, the Leader of the Opposition has asked me, as he did last year, to draw together some of the themes in this year’s debate and respond, where relevant, to some of the speeches from the Government side, and I am delighted to do so.

1285 I also want to congratulate Ministers for, on the whole, concentrating on the positives and what they in their Ministries have done, rather than trumpeting the same tired tune about what they say – wrongly, as it happens – the GSD did whilst in government. Frankly, it has become as tiresome as it is irrelevant to the issue of whether they deserve the continued trust of the people of Gibraltar. They have been in government for over 10 years. It is their record that we judge and at the next election the people of Gibraltar will turn their backs on them in their droves, (**Several**
1290 **Members:** Hear, hear.) and with reason.

1295 What, therefore, are the differences that separate this side of the House from that side? There are two issues that separate this and that side of the House. The first is how far should the Government bear some responsibility for the financial mess we find ourselves in and for the measures that the Government introduced, hitting working-class families and companies, in particular in the light of the consistent warnings that we gave from this side of the House, both pre Brexit and pre COVID. The second is the extraordinary overspend in the last financial year, which is difficult to justify on its own but particularly when we consider the service the public is getting in return. We spent £170 million on health last year, £30 million above the estimate. The least you would expect is that the appointments system at the Primary Care Centre would work or that at least people’s calls are answered. Here we are in a real financial crisis and the Government cannot even control public overspending – not spending but overspending: £90 million, as the Hon. the Leader of the Opposition said in his address yesterday, which feeds inevitably into the reasons for the measures that the Government introduced on Tuesday. Even if you calculate that overspend differently by taking into account the contributions from the COVID
1300 Fund into the Consolidated Fund, it still leaves you with an overspend in the tens of millions of pounds.
1305

1310 Let me take the first issue first. The Chief Minister, during the course of his address, said the challenges of COVID, Brexit and Ukraine scar our economy. The Deputy Chief Minister said ‘grossly unfair to belittle or underestimate the pandemic’. It cannot be denied that the pandemic has catapulted us into an economic crisis which has caused us to sit on a mountain of debt. More on

the mountain of debt in due course, Mr Speaker. Minister Isola said that Brexit and COVID are not made up; they are not excuses but unprecedented events. The hon. Lady, tonight, said, 'Where have they been in the last two years?' Indeed, where has she been in the last 11 years? The common theme is do not blame the Government, blame external unavoidable factors – the political get-out-of-jail-free card. Of course no one denies the challenges of Brexit or COVID or the Ukraine war, no one on this side belittles or underestimates the pandemic or the economic crisis that they have brought in their wake. Yes, these are unprecedented events. Yes, the immediate deficit in the public finances has been caused by COVID – I stand by everything that I said last year – but what you cannot do is, by a political sleight of hand and a political deception, airbrush away the gross mismanagement of our public finances over 10 years, which we predicted would have consequences in the future if we faced an international downturn. Their mismanagement of the public finances was a disaster waiting to happen and there is absolutely no doubt that regardless of COVID or Brexit, sooner or later they would have had to take corrective measures. It is that mismanagement that has massively contributed to what the Leader of the Opposition has appositely described as putting their hands in the collective right-hand pockets of ordinary working people and small businesses in Gibraltar, and what is worse is that after the next election, should they win – God forbid – they will put the other hand into the collective left-hand pockets of the people, and businesses too. Nowhere have the failings of this Government been more apparent than the mismanagement of the public finances. Nowhere have they betrayed their own traditional core principles more than in the management of the public finances. Nowhere have they placed the Gibraltarian more in jeopardy than they have in the management of the public finances.

The Chief Minister said that underpinning this Budget was 'the spirit of prudence and responsibility'. It is a real shame that he was not possessed of that same spirit when we were urging prudence and responsibility over the last 10 years, or that he managed to instil that very same spirit over the last year to ensure that his Government did not overspend by £90 million.

They are the party that has always professed to stand for financial stability as the foundation for mounting a proper defence of our national interest. It was only with these foundations – or so the Father of the House would say in the 1980s and 1990s – that we could properly defend against pressure from our neighbours and indeed at times from the periodic machinations of the UK government. Over the last 10 years, and all for the sake of piling on the votes – not just winning but winning by landslides – they have played Russian roulette with those public finances, unconcerned by warnings from this side of the House about the weakened position it was leaving this community in if the global situation deteriorated or turned. Whilst we could not have predicted COVID or Brexit – although I did refer to the possibility of Brexit in these very same debates prior to it happening – our warnings were clear and unheeded. Whilst we want the best outcome and the best deal for Gibraltar in treaty talks, and if we get a decent deal we will be the first to support it, it is their mismanagement of this issue, the public finances, that has contributed significantly to the weakening of our position – of that there is no doubt.

I have always admired the Chief Minister's energy, more than he knows. For the first six years of his Government there was no interest group or person who held his hand out that the Chief Minister did not personally see or write to, to promise a cure for every conceivable ill or request. Where was his newfound 'no free rides' mantra because 'previous generations had no free ride' when he was throwing taxpayer-subsidised parties to the annual tune of £4.5 million? We all like a party but that, with respect, was a tad excessive. It was bound to catch up with him and it did many years ago. Many times we pointed out that in Bermuda, when governments there changed the borrowing limits – much as they did in 2016 – electoral auctions reached such levels that their government ended up borrowing to pay for recurrent expenditure. The popularity of this Government has rested on a mountain of pre-COVID debt and out-of-control expenditure. That is his legacy when it comes to the public finances of this community, and that is what also underpins the measures that he announced on Tuesday – and as with every political sleight of hand, it has

rested on ensuring that either people did not understand or, frankly, did not care whilst they had money in their pockets.

1365 But debt mountains are deferred taxation or cuts in public service, or both. We already sat on a mountain of debt of £1.45 billion before COVID – or have they forgotten? It was inevitable, and this is what we see in this Budget. Of course these worrying figures are attributable to COVID in the first instance, but all COVID has done is accelerate the inevitable downturn that would have occurred anyway and added to what was already an alarming situation. Of that there is also no doubt. A strong economy, sound public finances and money in the bank to see us through difficult
1370 times – those are the foundations of true success. That is the way that we have consistently said we would protect the Gibraltarian way of life. They are the principles that have guided our warnings in these debates for the last 10 years. They cannot now point to those same principles to justify the austerity measures which they, in part, have caused.

1375 Sadly, it will be people of moderate means who will be the hardest hit. He says this is not austerity. He accused us of wanting austerity when we put forward a detailed plan of debt and expenditure reduction pre Brexit because we were concerned even then by the mountain of debt he had accumulated and increasing expenditure. The classic definition of austerity is economic policy consisting of tax increases, spending cuts or both, used by governments to reduce large deficits. If what the Government served up on Tuesday is not austerity then quite frankly I do not
1380 know what is.

Trust is as important in politics as it is in business and personal relationships. Let me remind the people of Gibraltar of the phenomenal sleights of hand performed by this Government in the management of these public finances and why we say from this side of the House that the people cannot trust them. In 2011, when gross public debt stood at £540 million, inclusive of debt in
1385 Government-owned companies, the Chief Minister said – then I think he was the Leader of the Opposition – that the GSD was addicted to debt. Today, it stands at £1.8 billion. That is 333% more gross debt than when he said that the GSD was addicted to debt. Only £350 million of that is attributable to COVID, so when the Deputy Chief Minister says we are sitting on a mountain of debt caused by COVID, my answer to that is that £350 million is but a hill compared with the
1390 mountain of debt we were sitting on pre COVID. The Chief Minister said it is the oldest trick in the book, like blaming Labour for the debt that followed the collapse of the markets in 2008. The difference is that we were carrying a staggering amount of debt prior to COVID and we consistently warned about its consequences. That is the difference. In 2011 he castigated us because there was £20 million of borrowing in Government-owned companies. Today, in
1395 Government-owned companies the debt stands at £990 million. That is a 4,950% increase in off-balance-sheet debt, i.e. not included in this Book, from the time that he was lambasting us because we had £20 million of debt in Government-owned companies. I accept there was debt in Government-owned companies in 2011, but it was minuscule compared with the systematic re-engineering of our public finances through the use of Government-owned companies, companies
1400 that are not only repositories of off-balance-sheet debt but are used to pay for expenditure that would otherwise come from Government revenue. In other words, it not only distorts the extent of true debt owed by Gibraltar plc, it also distorts the true extent of expenditure of the Government. That is why we have consistently voted against the Budget since, yes, Mr Clinton persuaded me that we should do so.

1405 He can see from that exposition that I do understand the link between expenditure and debt and vice-versa. It is a shame that he did not better understand it over the last 10 years. In 2011 the hon. Member lambasted us because he said that every man, woman and child was notionally indebted to the tune of £16,000. By his own measurements today it stands at £60,000, 375% more than when he made the point in 2011. Indeed, the difference is that we never mortgaged working-class housing estates in order to secure that debt.
1410

In December 2011 he said that he had found an impenetrable curtain and as he addressed the nation he told us there was a serious public finance and public debt problem. He then, after saying that, proceeded in four short years to borrow not only that huge amount of debt that I alluded to

a few moments ago but also spend £750 million on capital projects. The curtain hiding the debt mountain on which we sit in Government-owned companies has no equal in the history of the public finances. No one knows how the Government has precisely spent £400 million in Credit Finance Company Ltd or the £300 million borrowed through Gibraltar Capital Assets, to give but two examples. Indeed, we do not even know whether all of this has been spent or part of it is still in cash.

Those are just a few reasons why people listening to this debate, when they come to weigh whether they believe the Government or they believe the Opposition ... That is why the people of Gibraltar should believe the discourse of the Opposition, because we have been consistent and, despite the fact that it came at an electoral cost, we never deviated from what we thought was right. *(Banging on desks)* **(A Member: Hear, hear.)**

I now want to also just explain how we ended up in the mess that we are in today – in other words, how we ended up with that mountain of public debt. I want to explain that. Every country has legislation that is designed to prevent governments borrowing in a manner that becomes unaffordable to the community – and so did we when they first came into government. But the problem the Government faced was that because of those legal borrowing limits it could not borrow what it needed in order to deliver on its manifesto commitments in 2011. Not only couldn't it legally borrow but it did not have the cash in the bank in order to pay for those commitments. They promised £750 million in capital projects to reduce rents, rates and electricity, and then, to boot, to donate every single last penny of government surpluses to Community Care. It does not take a rocket scientist – and indeed, to reduce debt, if you are saying, 'I am going to be spending £750 million; all the spare cash I have in my pocket I am going to donate to a charity and I am also going to reduce the debt that I am lumbered with,' how on earth are you going to be spending that colossal amount of money on capital projects?

The way they did it was this. The first thing they did – not the first thing, but close to the first thing they did, and they did not tell the electorate in 2011 they were going to do it – was to amend the Gibraltar Savings Bank Act. I think it was 2012, or 2013 it may have been, not quite soon afterwards. The Gibraltar Savings Bank Act at that stage, pre amendment, only allowed the proceeds of Gibraltar Savings Bank debentures to be invested in money or moneys-worth investments, a very safe form of investment, usually UK Treasury bonds. They introduced an amendment that did away with that and meant that the Government could then use the debentures in the Gibraltar Savings Bank to invest in whatever they wanted. Thus they began shifting Government debt, which of course appears in this Book as the debt owned by the Government from Government, direct debt, into the Gibraltar Savings Bank, where it is a direct debt of the Gibraltar Savings Bank, not a debt of the Government. That is the way in which they then circumvented the legal borrowing limits, because your Government debt is within the legal limits but you then have this indirect debt sitting in the Gibraltar Savings Bank, which of course is not accountable as Government debt.

From 11th December 2011 to 1st May 2013, just under two years, the total value of Government debentures had been reduced by £151 million. During that same period the total value of debt security issued by the Gibraltar Savings Bank rose spectacularly from £24 million to £272 million, and that was just the beginning of their administration but the trend accelerated. It allowed the Government not only to keep the debt off balance sheet but its expenditure, too, by injecting hundreds of millions of pounds into Government-owned companies which then spent the money on the projects. That is how they did it, and it is irresponsible. Why is it irresponsible? Because the legislation that is there to prevent governments from borrowing in a manner that becomes unaffordable is there for a reason. It is not there to try to avoid and evade. That is the reason why it was dangerous. Millions of pounds went from the Gibraltar Savings Bank into Credit Finance and Gibraltar Investment Holdings Ltd, the company which has traditionally been used to fund other Government-owned companies. It is a company that sits at the top of the pyramid of Government-owned companies, so traditionally the way that Government would fund Government-owned companies is by injecting money from the Consolidated Fund into Gibraltar

Investment Holdings Ltd and that would then trickle down to the other companies that were owned by the Government. Of course, if you are injecting into Gibraltar Investment Holdings Ltd money in the hundreds of millions from the Gibraltar Savings Bank, you do not have to do it from your own pocket as the Government.

1470 That is the link that he says we did not understand between debt and expenditure, in simple terms. That is why I predicted in 2013 that this would have huge consequences for transparency and accountability in relation to the public finances. I feel immensely proud of the fact that that was my rooky speech as Leader of the Opposition and I predicted what the Government was about to do, and I was spot-on. This is why contributions to the Consolidated Fund – in other words, the
1475 kitty – (*Interjection by Hon. Chief Minister*) I am going to repeat it so the Government listens to this, (**A Member:** Hear, hear.) bearing in mind that they said that we did not understand the link between debt and Government expenditure. This is why contributions from the Consolidated Fund – in other words, the kitty into which all Government revenue is paid to the IDF, the kitty out of which the Government pays for its projects – went down, not surprisingly given what they did,
1480 from £181 million in 2012 to an actual of £51 million for the two years 2019-21 and then £19 million for 2021-22.

Mr Speaker, to make good my point that the Government just cannot be trusted and people listening should prefer the discourse of the Leader of the Opposition to that of the Chief Minister, I want to demonstrate how at every step of the way after this amendment to the Gibraltar Savings Bank they misled and lied to the people of Gibraltar. Let me give you some examples of that, too.
1485 During the 2013 by-election, even when we had found indisputable evidence –

Mr Speaker: I think with respect to the speaker, he cannot accuse the Government of lying just like that, without any concrete proof. (*Interjection by Hon. Chief Minister*) You should not use the word ‘lie’. It is out of order.
1490

Hon. Chief Minister: Unparliamentary.

Hon. D A Feetham: Mr Speaker, of course I will abide by any ruling that Mr Speaker gives.
1495 I think there are two points here. (*Interjection by Hon. Chief Minister*) One is the point made by Mr Speaker about it being supported by facts. I think anybody listening to this speech will come to the conclusion that what I am saying is supported by fact. The second is the point that the Chief Minister made from a sedentary position about the bringing of a motion. That is a more substantive objection to the use of the word ‘lie’.

1500 May I use ‘economical with the truth’? I think that is probably more parliamentary, Mr Speaker.

Hon. Chief Minister: Mr Speaker, I have no difficulty with the hon. Gentleman saying ‘economical with the truth’ or any other phrase which has been judged to be a parliamentary alternative to the word that he used, but in every parliament under the Westminster system that
1505 follows *Erskine May*, when that word is used it has to be withdrawn and the speaker can then use an alternative, if he wishes; or, having withdrawn it in the course of a debate, he can then bring a substantive motion, if he wishes, which is what the Rules provide for. If I had used it, I would have to say formally I had withdrawn it and then use an alternative. I think that we can all agree to continue to abide by tradition and parliamentary language or we can all agree not to abide by
1510 parliamentary language rulings which are accepted by everyone.

Hon. D A Feetham: Mr Speaker, I am not going to withdraw something that I believe, that has formed part of my discourse over the last 12 years.

I will, of course, use alternative language. I have suggested ‘economical with the truth’. I
1515 believe that I am entitled to say that a Government has misled the people of Gibraltar – I am perfectly entitled to do so – and I think that I am entitled to say that the Government has been economical with the truth with the people of Gibraltar.

I do not want to make a song and dance out of this, Mr Speaker, because I wish to get on with my speech, but the people out there listening to this debate and listening to my intervention and listening to the way that my intervention has been stopped in mid flow – (*Interjection*) yes – because of this, because I have said that the Government has not –

Mr Speaker: No, I think the use of the word ‘lied’ ... I have been quite liberal in allowing lots of things which have words, phrases, sentences and paragraphs that have been exchanged. We started off with the Leader of the Opposition suggesting that the Chief Minister had used his meeting the Pope very impiously. I let that go. I thought it was in bad taste but I let it go because there was no objection. We have then gradually listened to the increase in the kinds of words and phrases that have been used to describe actions by the Government. We heard the Hon. Elliott Phillips with such gusto being, at times, quite disrespectful to the Government, and I have allowed it to happen because there was no objection by the Chief Minister.

Up to now, I have not noted anything which gave me reason to stop the Hon. Daniel Feetham, but with the use of the word ‘lied’ ... I have to stop you saying that word. I would ask you to agree to withdraw the word ‘lied’ and then we can get on with listening to your speech.

Hon. D A Feetham: No, Mr Speaker. If Mr Speaker wants me to withdraw the word ‘lie’ ... I will not withdraw the word ‘lie’. I will sit down and not continue with my speech. The people of Gibraltar will know that I have not continued with my speech because Mr Speaker has not allowed me to essentially make a point that I do not consider I should be withdrawing. I have said that I will use alternative language.

Hon. Chief Minister: Mr Speaker, if I could be of assistance in my capacity as Leader of the House, rather than as Chief Minister – we want to hear what the hon. Gentleman has to say. I want him to say it so I can reply to him, to show that the thing that he has said – which he should not have said – he believes about us we are able to demonstrate about him. So I do not want him not to be able to give the speech, but he has to do it in terms which are parliamentary, otherwise we can all say things which have been ruled not to be parliamentary and I will be able to say about them the thing which he has said about us – which is unparliamentary – which I believe about him as much as he says he believes about me.

Therefore, I wonder whether the hon. Gentleman might agree – this might assist the hon. Gentleman, so I am genuinely trying to help him and he might want to listen – if it might help you, Mr Speaker, and it might help the hon. Gentleman, that he might say that although he continues to believe it, he withdraws it. He would then be able to continue with his speech, which I would very much like to hear because he entertains me greatly, he speaks a great amount of nonsense and I do enjoy replying to him and demonstrating that the people of Gibraltar can put absolutely no stock by what they say because the more they say it, the more they assist me in demonstrating that what they have said is that which he says we have incurred in.

Hon. K Azopardi: May I just, on this issue, Mr Speaker ...? What I had heard, and I may not have heard it properly but what I thought my hon. colleague was talking about when he uttered the phrase ... He was describing the Government. As I had understood previously the rule ... I am asking for clarification from Mr Speaker and I am staring at the Standing Orders, in particular Standing Order 45(6), which is ‘No Member shall impute improper motives to any other Member’ ... I can understand that if he had said that a particular Minister had lied, that is about imputing improper motives of any Member and I can understand that in that context he would be asked by the Chair to withdraw a particular remark which would be unparliamentary, but he is not imputing improper motives of any particular individual, he is talking about Government generally and it is a different point. So I am asking for clarification, Mr Speaker.

We do not understand the Rules to say that, when there is a much more general description of the Government, and indeed there have been plenty of occasions when the Members opposite

1570 have used language that has been, if not similar, a carbon copy of remarks which Mr Speaker, when looking at Members on this side of the House, seems to be offended by. There have been plenty of remarks both in this session and in previous sessions, not least the last Budget session, where similar remarks have been made by the Government.

1575 **Mr Speaker:** I think Members generally believe that they have a right to challenge the Speaker when the Speaker says something that may not be understood or accepted by Members, generally speaking. The fact is that it is not right and it is not in order. It is out of order to challenge the Speaker.

1580 I cannot at this stage give you a clarification. What I can say is that if you ... What you are suggesting is that the whole of the Government has lied, then, because that is what ... The hon. Member has generalised by saying the Government has lied, (*Interjection*) that Members have lied on this side, so it is not as an individual.

Hon. D A Feetham: The Government.
1585

Mr Speaker: The Government consists of the Members of this House on the Government side.

Hon. D A Feetham: Mr Speaker, of course the rule is there in order to avoid a situation where you impute improper motive to the individual. That is unparliamentary. But if you effectively prevent somebody on this side, in the Opposition, from saying a Government has lied over a particular issue, this is effectively castrating an Opposition because – (**Mr Speaker:** No.) No, of course, Mr Speaker, there may be – (*Interjections*) May I be allowed to finish? (*Interjection*) Well, okay. Well, Mr Speaker –

1595 **Mr Speaker:** I do not think –

Hon. D A Feetham: Mr Speaker has already intervened – (*Interjection*) Mr Speaker has already prevented me from continuing; now he is preventing me from making the point that I wish to make. (*Interjections*)
1600

Mr Speaker: That is unfair and wrong. Of course it is unfair and you know it is unfair.

Hon. D A Feetham: No, it is not.

1605 **Mr Speaker:** Yes. You should not even be challenging me on that one. What you need to do now is simply change the word and use another word to describe the message you want to give. This is easy, very simple.

Hon. D A Feetham: I have done that, Mr Speaker. I have explained that.
1610

Mr Speaker: Then there is no need to continue this argument. Get on with the speech, please.

Hon. D A Feetham: I did that 15 minutes ago, Mr Speaker, but because of the intervention of the Chief Minister, which ... you were effectively carrying on with the point that he made ... This is why we are where we are. (*Interjection by Hon. Chief Minister*)
1615

Mr Speaker, to make good my point that the Government just cannot be trusted and people listening should prefer the discourse of the Leader of the Opposition to the Chief Minister, I want to demonstrate how, at every step of the way, they have misled the people of Gibraltar. Let me give you examples of that.

1620 During the 2013 by-election, even when we had found indisputable evidence that the Government had used the proceeds of the Gibraltar Savings Bank debentures, through Credit

Finance, for the purposes of loans to the *Sunborn*, it was denied in this House – in and outside this House, actually – until after the election was over. When it was then admitted, it was justified on the absurd basis that Credit Finance Company was some form of sovereign fund. That is misleading the people of Gibraltar. The problem that we have in Gibraltar is that, of course, there is no independent reporting where a media outlet will stick its neck out and say that Government is misleading people, the Opposition is right; it will report what one party and the other say in press releases. A Government that wants to confuse and obfuscate can do so. No one confuses and obfuscates like they do – they are the masters of it.

And then, in 2015, when we were telling people that all this indirect Government debt, when added to direct Government debt, has seen the Government exceed the borrowing limits not by £20 million but by 10 country miles, they denied it. However, a year later, in 2016, they came to this House and altered the legal borrowing limit by delinking it from recurrent revenue and linking it to a percentage of GDP. These are the same amendments which Bermuda introduced, which led to the spiralling of debt problems in that jurisdiction. What is worse is that in this case, during that General Election, we had made public debt an electoral issue and they never said to the people of Gibraltar, 'We not only defend the levels of public debt but we are going to change the legal borrowing limits in order to allow us to borrow more.' That would have been the honest thing for them to have said at that election, to show the courage of their convictions. The Chief Minister said during his address, 'We are not afraid to make decisions. I have said many times that politics is about making and defending decisions.' But he did not tell people, 'Not only do we think that public debt is low but we are going to change the legal borrowing limits to allow us to borrow more.' Instead, they kept the people in the dark and, just as they did in 2011 when they had already planned to amend the Gibraltar Savings Bank Act as a precursor of the re-engineering of the public finances of Gibraltar, they kept quiet about changing the borrowing limits, all the while telling people that we were lying when we said that the true debt of Gibraltar plc exceeded the legal limits. That is what they were saying, that we were lying about it.

None of this takes into account the mortgaging of the housing estates in 2016, which they did not tell people would occur during the 2015 election or the sale of their interest in the 50-50 home ownership estates in 2019, all of which was pre COVID. In simple terms, to use a term people will understand, they were mortgaged to the hilt before COVID without any leeway in case we had a rainy day. So when they say we have been caught in a veritable rain storm, we say, 'You should not have mortgaged your umbrella.'

On this issue they have never been straight and you cannot believe anything they say. They have confused, obfuscated and attempted to hide the evidence, and this is the reason why every year there is a sharp contrast in the discourse from this side to that side of the House, and for the reasons that I have outlined, people should not trust them. That is a political point that I and this Opposition are entitled to make, and we will continue to make them, Mr Speaker. (*Interjections*)

To say that we should airbrush away all that and stand like political automatons in unity with the Government is as nonsensical as it is farcical and the people should be astute to social media sirens making calls to that effect. Whilst I am a Member of this House I will continue to be true to our message and our arguments during the last 10 years because they were honest and they were sound. They may not have garnered votes and they may have directly contributed to their landslides. No one wants to be told we have to be prudent in the face of a Government throwing parties at a cost of £4.5 million to the taxpayer, but if they had listened to us we would have been in a much better position today to navigate the difficult waters ahead. There would have been fewer people expecting more for less, and our collective expectations would have been recalibrated sooner and in a far less painful way. For these reasons, I would urge those listening to this debate to prefer the discourse of my learned and hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition over those of the Chief Minister.

I want to briefly just touch on a number of points to conclude, with Mr Speaker's leave. In relation to the message that was circulating through social media – I think it was WhatsApp – I was told by the hon. Lady, Marlene Hassan Nahon ... I reached out to her, as indeed I know the

Leader of the Opposition also reached out to her, and I said that it was the product of a sick mind.
 1675 I want to publicly state that today (*Banging on desks*) and disassociate everybody on this side of the House from those messages.

Secondly, my hon. and learned Friend Mr Phillips, in his quite magnificent speech, did make a point about e-scooters and criticised the Government for the time it has taken for that legislation to come to the House. It is my fault because I have not communicated this to Mr Phillips, but the
 1680 delay is in large part my own fault. I represent – I declare this interest – the Motor Insurance Bureau, which has been in contact and in talks with the Government of Gibraltar and, as stakeholders, they wish to make some amendments to that legislation. That is reason why it is taking the time it is taking.

The third point is related to the statements made by the Chief Minister and also the hon. Lady about not having a reverse gear on the gains that they have introduced in relation to same-sex couples, for example. Mr Speaker, I stood in a minority of four in this House when I introduced a Private Member's Bill seeking to equalise the age of consent in 2009-10. At the time, actually, it was, politically, not a very sexy theme – if you do not mind me using that term – and, indeed, politically unsafe. We did it anyway, in a minority of four, and I know that the Hon. the Leader of
 1690 the Opposition was supportive of that from outside the House. When the legislation for same-sex partnerships was introduced by hon. Members opposite in this House, everybody on this side of the House voted in favour of it, including my hon. and learned Friend Mr Bossino. When they introduced same-sex marriage, it was supported unanimously from this side of the House. There is no question of a GSD government going in reverse gear in relation to any of that.

Having said that, I do wish to simply add this. My learned friend Mr Bossino yesterday made the point that we should be careful about the majority stamping out the views and the voices of the minority. I have huge respect and sympathy for that view and I think that it is right that people who have a different view in a democracy ought to be able to express those different views, but I think it is also right that we should, from this side of the House, also clarify that there is absolutely
 1700 no intention of reverse gear on any of the measures I have referred to, or any other measure that the Government has introduced in the last 10 years that they have been in government.

Mr Speaker, that is my contribution. I thank you, and may I also ...? Mr Speaker knows that I hold him in very high esteem. We were friends before Mr Speaker became Speaker of this House and he has always been phenomenally helpful to me, not only as Speaker but also as Clerk of this
 1705 House when he was Clerk. Mr Speaker, if I have offended you in any way, I apologise for it. It is not my intention to offend Mr Speaker. Mr Speaker must understand, as well, from my point of view, that at times I have felt as if I have been the lonely voice in the desert in this particular debate. It is a matter that is very close to my heart and therefore, when I say that the Government – I am not going to use the word – has misled the people of Gibraltar on this, I do genuinely believe it. There is no intention of offending you in any way, shape or form, and if I have,
 1710 I apologise for it because your friendship means more to me than me making a political point. (*Banging on desks*)

Mr Speaker: The Hon. Gilbert Licudi.

Hon. Chief Minister: Hear, hear.

Hon. G H Licudi: Mr Speaker, it is getting late. That is how Mr Feetham started his speech. Then he said he would be brief, and I am not sure that he kept to his promise. (*Interjection*) But what
 1720 Mr Feetham also said is that we should not be looking back – and then he treated us to a history lesson, going back to 2011, including reminding us of his rookie speech as Leader of the Opposition. He told us a few minutes ago that he was spot-on in that speech, but history will tell us that it was not a position that he held for very long at all. For my part, I do intend to be brief. I do not have ministerial responsibilities anymore and I will limit myself to making some general comments.

1725 We have, over the last few days, listened to all Ministers – except, of course, the Hon. Father of the House, Sir Joe Bossano – and we have listened to Members of the GSD opposite. I want to also start by sending my best wishes to Sir Joe and hope that he recovers and deals with – as I am sure he will – COVID successfully and that we will see him back in full force in this House very soon.

(Banging on desks)

1730 I also want to echo the words that we have heard in particular this afternoon from my hon. colleague and Friend Samantha Sacramento, which we have also heard from the Hon. Mr Feetham a few moments ago, in connection with the hon. Lady who is not here today, the Hon. Marlene Hassan Nahon. For very understandable reasons we have not been able to enjoy her presence and her speech. I use the word ‘enjoy’ advisedly, even though I am sure there would have been many
1735 parts of the speech, or all of the speech, that we would not have agreed with, but we certainly would have enjoyed her presence and her speech *(Banging on desks)* and I do want to add my own sympathies and condolences to her, to her sister Fleur and to the rest of the family on the recent passing.

Mr Speaker, over the last couple of days we have heard much from Members opposite but
1740 essentially what we have heard are the same tired old speeches. It is almost as if they dig up what they said last year or the year before, look at the adjectives they used in those speeches in those years and simply change a few dates, change a few figures, change a few facts here and there and regurgitate what we have been hearing from them over the last 10 or 11 years.

Mr Feetham has just made the point that they have been saying since 2011 that the Chief
1745 Minister and the Government have been misleading the electorate. Well, the electorate, over three elections – 2011, 2015 and 2019 – have preferred what they have heard from this side of the House and not from there, and therefore there should be a little bit more respect to the electorate. Essentially, he is saying that they have been treated for all this ... I cannot remember the exact word he used, but certainly misleading by the Government. He should not take the
1750 electorate for fools who are misled year in, year out, election in, election out and always choose the same option. One predicts that the same will happen next year, or whenever the Chief Minister feels it appropriate to call the next election, because we have seen nothing new from Members opposite, nothing constructive, nothing positive, nothing progressive.

Despite the pretence – and today we heard that from Mr Phillips – of trying to give the
1755 impression that he was trying to be constructive, there was absolutely nothing constructive in his speech. I am sure the Chief Minister in his reply, whenever that will come, will say something. I am sure he will have something to say about what Mr Phillips treated us to – and Mr Feetham, as well as other Members of the Opposition – because what we have been treated to, what we have seen in the last few days from Members opposite is no real understanding and no real
1760 appreciation of what we have been through in the last two years.

And no, this is not about blaming everything on COVID, despite what Members opposite have said. This is about facing reality, facing economic reality, facing political reality. Hon. Members opposite are very keen to start to criticise expenditure. They even criticise the Government when the Government seeks to avoid expenditure. We have seen that with Campion Park. *(Interjections)*
1765 I have been listening to – *(Interjections)* I have been here more than Mr Phillips and I have been listening to every single word that has been said in this House. *(Interjection)*

Hon. Chief Minister: You have hardly been here in all the debate. *(Interjections)*

1770 **Hon. G H Licudi:** Mr Speaker, hon. Members opposite ... Maybe I have struck a raw vein somewhere, but they should calm down and listen. In fact, we have just been told by Mr Feetham that we should listen to them and everybody should listen to each other, so they should listen to what we have to say from this side of the House. They are very keen – we have seen it in the last few days – to criticise expenditure and they criticise even when Government seeks to avoid expenditure. We have seen that with Campion House. We saw it from Mr Reyes himself, a point
1775 that was dealt with by my friend and colleague Mr Isola on the National Theatre when the call

from Mr Reyes was actually that it should be funded by Government. When Government is trying to avoid expenditure from public funds, Mr Reyes calls for this to be funded by Government.

1780 But then they go on not just to criticise the expenditure and ask Government to incur more expenditure; they go on to criticise revenue-raising measures. They describe what we have heard from the Chief Minister this week in terms of these Budget measures as a highwayman's Budget, as picking the pockets of workers – from Mr Phillips, today, a Sheriff of Nottingham style Budget. It again displays no understanding of what politics is like in the real world, and that is the world we live in. We live in the real world. This is not the world of Harry Potter, where one can simply
1785 wave a magic wand and everything will be solved, or things will appear or things will disappear. Despite Mr Feetham's attempts to justify that they understand this, it is clear that they do not understand that Gibraltar is not immune from global issues. They say that, they pay lip service to it, and then ignore it completely and go on in the usual year-after-year rant. But it is clear that we do not live in a cocoon in Gibraltar. We do not have a magic cape which envelops the Rock of
1790 Gibraltar and protects us.

It is a fact that there has been an invasion of Ukraine and that it has had global consequences, even for us, even for Europe. It is a fact that there have been increases in the price of oil and that affects us. It is a fact that there have been increases in the prices of food products and that affects us. It is a fact that there has been unavailability of goods and components and that affects us. And
1795 of course it is a fact that we have had COVID, not just from the point of view of the health issues and other public health issues that have arisen, but also from the economic perspective and the public finance perspective, the way it has affected our public finance. That is a fact, and what we are seeing is that over the last two years extraordinary measures have had to be taken. Who would have thought that measures would have had to be introduced to restrain some of the basic
1800 liberties we take for granted? And who would have thought that we would have to introduce some of the economic measures to deal with the economic effects – not just with the practical and health effects of COVID but with the economic effects of COVID? These are measures which have been brought to this House from an economic point of view and which have been debated in this House, and these are measures which hon. Members opposite have supported and endorsed, and
1805 now they are critical.

On occasions it is necessary to take tough measures. As the Hon. Chief Minister mentioned this week, sometimes tough but necessary decisions and measures are needed, and the same is true of the Budget that has been presented this week. No one in this House and no one outside this House likes to hear about increases in taxes, about levies on companies, on passengers or anybody
1810 else. These are measures which certainly can be unpopular, but they are sometimes necessary and it is what being in government is about. It is about having to face the reality of the world we live in. It is about having to take tough decisions, decisions which are in the interest of Gibraltar as a whole because that must be the guiding principle – and all of this seems to be lost on Members opposite.

1815 Mr Phillips did not ignore COVID. He mentioned the effects of COVID on our community but made no mention whatsoever of the effect of COVID on public finances. There has been no suggestion, nothing said from the other side on what they would have done. How would they have dealt with the public finance, with the economic response in relation to COVID? How would they have handled those economic and public finance issues we have faced? It is one thing for
1820 Members opposite simply to stand up and criticise specific revenue-raising measures, but it is another to criticise proposed revenue-raising measures without offering an alternative, without offering anything else. It is as if they say there should be no revenue-raising measures at all. Well, how do we pay for the extraordinary expenses that we have had to incur in the last two years?

1825 It is a mark, I would suggest, of an irresponsible Opposition, and of course it leads to a lack of credibility in the Opposition we have. One of the reasons I say that is because we have heard many statements made this week without any sort of analysis. I will give an example. The Leader of the Opposition criticised the passenger levy that has been announced and which I would suggest is modest by any standard, and then he said this will drive cruise liners away. Why, Mr Speaker? I

ask that rhetorically; I do not expect Mr Speaker to give me a response. Why will it drive cruise liners away? The hon. Member ignored that point and simply made the bold statement that this will drive cruise liners away. What sort of comparative study have they made to come up with such a conclusion? It would be understandable if they made such comment and backed it up with figures; if they said, 'We have looked at the overall cost. We have looked at our competitors. This is what is charged in Malaga, in Cadiz and in Malta. We have done all that, we have done that study and this is why we think this will drive cruise liners away.' But they have not done any of that. It is just criticism for the sake of criticism, it is shooting from the hip, and again it loses them credibility when they do not back it up – not just with figures but any kind of analysis at all. Have they looked at passenger levies in other jurisdictions, in other ports? Have they looked at mooring fees? Have they looked at the types of services that are provided to cruise liners and other vessels? Have they looked at the fees in relation to bunkering? Have they looked at the overall product that we provide in Gibraltar? Nothing that the hon. Members have said this week suggests that they have.

The Leader of the Opposition, when he made that comment, said, 'Mr Bossino, in his intervention, will give more details,' and what we heard from Mr Bossino was essentially limiting himself to saying that we needed to be competitive. Of course we agree – everyone agrees with a statement such as 'we need to be competitive'. We need to be competitive in the Port, in financial services, in gaming services, in every service we provide, because we live in a global market where competition is very keen. Everybody agrees with that. But what they did not address, what they said nothing at all about is why this levy will make us uncompetitive. Why is it that this levy will make us uncompetitive? If, as a result of this levy, Gibraltar was three times more expensive than all our competitors I could understand the point, but nothing like that is analysed and considered by Members opposite.

I can tell hon. Members that when I had responsibility for the Port this was something I looked at. I sought information about what other Ports charge – nearby ports like Malaga and Cadiz and further-afield ports in the Mediterranean – and the conclusion I remember coming to was that Gibraltar is very competitive indeed when you look at the overall package, not just one isolated matter, that Gibraltar is very competitive indeed and that there was scope for a modest increase; we would not drive anyone away by having a modest increase to the Port dues and the cost of coming to Gibraltar. Gibraltar continues and will continue to be a very attractive proposition, a very attractive destination for cruise liners. That was the conclusion that I reached. Members opposite may say, 'What happened? Why didn't you introduce it?' Well, COVID happened and cruise liners stopped coming, and therefore it was not a matter that could be considered at that particular time. My advice – and I say this wholeheartedly – is simply that you have to do your homework before coming to this House and making statements such as that, because we have to be careful about the message we send out there. We do not want to drive cruise liners away, we do not want people to think that they are unwelcome in Gibraltar – and that is the sort of message that is being put out by Members of the Opposition, and that is irresponsible.

The other thing in relation to this is when they criticise this revenue-raising measure, importantly they do not say, 'Don't do that, do it in another way – raise the revenue you need in some other way.' We have heard nothing about that in all of the speeches by Members opposite. What is their alternative? When looking at this particular measure, what is their alternative? Are they saying instead of 2p it should be 3p in the pound? Instead of £25 per company it should be £30 per company? What is their alternative? There is, quite frankly, no credibility in their approach.

I also want to mention very briefly a matter that Mr Reyes said in his contribution. This was in relation to new schools when he said that when a new project, a new school, is being built, there should be more consultation with teachers. I did not take that to be a criticism of the schools themselves; it was just an observation or suggestion by Mr Reyes, or perhaps even an implicit criticism that there was not sufficient consultation with teachers when it comes to new schools. He suggested it should not be left to architects simply to produce fancy designs without looking

at the requirements of the schools. It is a fact – and I do not say this in a disparaging way of Mr Reyes – that Mr Reyes, who had ministerial responsibility in the GSD Government, had no experience during his time in government of building a new school and he would not understand and would not know what was the process of building a new school. Come to think of it, no GSD Minister had experience of building a new school because in 15 years in office they built no new schools at all. (**Hon. Chief Minister:** Exactly.) (*Interjection by Hon. D A Feetham*) Mr Feetham says he has heard enough and he wants to leave. Goodbye.

Hon. Chief Minister: The truth hurts. (*Interjection by Hon. D A Feetham*)

Hon. G H Licudi: Mr Speaker, the GSD of which Mr Feetham – who now wants to leave, who has had enough of listening ... Mr Feetham was also a Member of that GSD Government and he did not have any experience in building new schools, (**Hon. Chief Minister:** Exactly.) and neither did any of his colleagues, but during my time in government when I had ministerial responsibility for Education I did have experience in building new schools. I say this in the most constructive way possible in terms of offering an explanation to Mr Reyes and Members opposite as to how this process works, because I was involved in the building, during our first term of office, of the two St Bernard's schools, then, in my second stint in Education, in connection with the plans for the new St Mary's, and my friend and colleague Prof. Cortes has very extensive experience in building new schools and can expand or elaborate, confirm or corroborate what I am going to say because he has hands-on experience in these matters.

What we need to realise is how this process starts, what is the first thing that happens when a decision is taken to build a new school. The very first step that is taken is that the school is asked for a list of requirements. So, when we want to build a new St Bernard's First School, we ask St Bernard's First School, 'What are your requirements in terms of the new school? How many standard classrooms do you need? What specialist classrooms do you need – music room, art room, breakout rooms for children with special needs, staff room – even offices and storerooms?' The school will put out that list – assembly area, gym ... All of that has to come from the school. It is not something that an architect decides he wants to put in, it is not something that the Minister himself or herself would dream of, not even the Department of Education; this comes from the school itself, and that is considered and discussed with the Minister, with the Department and with the technical team that is going to be advising and putting together the project. But the school is the one that is first involved at the very outset of the process, and then what happens is a brief is prepared.

So, architects are not asked to design whatever they want and come up with whatever ideas they want about classrooms and gyms etc. They are given a specific brief, which comes originally from the schools themselves and the list of requirements is a fundamental part of that brief, and whether it is as part of a tender process or submissions of interest, before final architectural drawings are put together and produced, floor plans are produced reflecting the requirements that the schools themselves have identified, and that will then be taken back to the school and discussed and modified as necessary.

Only when everyone is satisfied, in particular the school involved, will the go-ahead be given for the full design and the drawings. This is certainly not a case of lack of consultation, not even a case of consultation; it is a case of full collaboration. It is a collaborative project starting with the very essence of those who are most interested in this: the schools, who will know the needs of themselves and their pupils. That is core to this particular process. Of course, one can look at a new school and say, 'With hindsight, this could have been done differently.' That is the same for any project, for any building, but that is not the same as lack of consultation or lack of adequate consultation, which is what Mr Reyes seemed to imply.

Mr Speaker, just to end, this Budget has been described as many things and I have mentioned already it has been described by Members opposite as a highwayman's Budget, as a pickpocketing Budget and as a Sheriff of Nottingham Budget. I have also heard it described as a brave Budget. In

fact, I have heard it said that this is the bravest Budget speech than any Chief Minister of Gibraltar has had to make. It is undoubtedly the case that the last two years have involved enormous sacrifices. It has affected all of us.

There are many decisions in Government, in terms of the decision itself, which are quite simple. If I, for example, am given sufficient funds and a place, and told, 'Go and build a new marina,' that decision is very simple. A different matter is how you do it and getting the end product you want, but once you have the funds and the place, the decision is go and do it. Nothing difficult about the decision itself, but what differentiates a mediocre government from a good government is the ability to take tough decisions and to get those tough decisions right. It is the ability to face challenging times and it is difficult to appreciate, to understand, to see, or even foresee, times more challenging than we have had and what the GSLP Liberal Government has had to face in the last couple of years. Again and again tough decisions have been taken, and again and again the Government had proved that it is prepared to take those tough and difficult decisions, however unpalatable at times they might appear to be.

It is undoubtedly true that the issues we face and the issues we have faced will not disappear overnight but it is very encouraging to hear some of the figures that the Chief Minister has given, not simply in relation to public finances but the economy generally, and the estimates of GDP which the Chief Minister gave in respect of the post-COVID year where we are reaching ... or just about there. We have bounced back, as I understand the Chief Minister mentioned, to pre-pandemic levels. But at the same time as the GDP bounces back, we have to make sure that public finances remain solid. We have to make sure that our ability to provide the services we need, the services we all want, is not compromised in any way, and sometimes it is necessary – and this year it is certainly necessary – to introduce measures which raise revenue and which make sure that we can all continue to enjoy those services that we hold dear.

Despite what Mr Feetham has said today, this is certainly not an austerity Budget. It is not a Budget that cuts services. In fact, it is a Budget that seeks to protect those very services, protect our ability to pay for those services. Indeed, we have heard some of the measures described as temporary measures, necessary but temporary. They are targeted, they are limited and I would suggest they are prudent in nature. For all those reasons, I certainly will support this Budget and will support the Second Reading of the Bill – in fact, the whole of the Appropriation Bill. I will lend my support.

Mr Speaker, before sitting down I want to end by adding my own tribute and congratulations to the Father of the House, Sir Joe Bossano, on reaching the milestone of 50 years as a parliamentarian. There are not many parliamentarians in the world, if any, who can boast such a record. And it is not just a question of longevity in this House, it is about 50 years of public service, 50 years of putting Gibraltar first, 50 years of putting the Gibraltarians first. Whether you agree or disagree with Sir Joe and his politics, no one can deny his unselfish commitment to the Gibraltar cause, defending our position in Gibraltar and outside in the four corners of the world. It is particularly noteworthy the undeniable fact that Sir Joe's ideals and economic aspirations for Gibraltar have not changed at all in the 50 years that he has been in this House. I tell the House that my own interest in politics came about in 1984 following the signing of the Brussels Agreement. It was an impassioned speech that I heard by Sir Joe about the dangers of Brussels that made me want to support the campaign to make sure that those dangers, the dangers of Brussels, did not come to pass, and of course what Sir Joe said then and what he has continued to believe has been proved right. His leadership was instrumental in difficult years in protecting us from those dangers, and Gibraltar has been blessed with an economic and political mind like no other. We have been lucky and long may he continue. I hope that he recovers very soon. *(Banging on desks)*

Adjournment

Mr Speaker: The Hon. the Chief Minister.

1985 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Mr Speaker, if I can thank the hon. backbencher for that demonstration of how one can be absolutely devastating of the Opposition's views and keep the language entirely parliamentary (**Two Members:** Hear, hear.) and the mood temperate, and reflect that it is unfortunate that we have not heard contributions of that sort from the other side on the seminal issues that we are dealing with in the context of this Appropriation Bill, and invite the House to return on Monday at 10 a.m. when I will have an opportunity to respond to all Members' speeches that we have heard in the past three days and then invite the House to make a final consideration of the Bill by voting for it and consider also the Third Reading and Committee Stage.

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Mr Speaker: I now propose the question, which is that this House do now adjourn to Monday, 4th July at 10 a.m.

1995 I now put the question, which is that this House do now adjourn to Monday, 4th July at 10 a.m. Those in favour? (**Members:** Aye.) Those against? Passed.

This House will now adjourn to Monday, 4th July at 10 a.m.

The House adjourned at 8.29p.m.