



PROCEEDINGS OF THE GIBRALTAR PARLIAMENT

AFTERNOON SESSION: 2.02 p.m. – 4.10 p.m.

Gibraltar, Wednesday, 12th July 2023

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The Gibraltar Parliament

The Parliament met at 2.02 p.m.

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

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

Appropriation Bill 2023 – Second Reading – Debate continued

Mr Speaker: The Hon. Albert Isola.

Minister for Digital, Financial Services, Health Authority and Public Utilities (Hon. A J Isola):

5 Thank you, Mr Speaker. This is my 10th Budget address as a Minister. I am a spring chicken in comparison to my colleagues on my right. I understand that the Hon. Leader of the Opposition has taken to asking questions in this Parliament on chickens, but I will come back to that in a little while.

10 I reflect on my 10 years here and why I was here in the first place. I was only here because we lost one of our own. I remember Charles Bruzon at this moment, an absolute gentleman, an excellent servant of this party and this Parliament in Gibraltar, and I think it is appropriate at this time just to reflect and remember him 10 years on from when we lost him. (*Banging on desks*)

15 The line of the Opposition this far, and I am sure it will be repeated ad nauseam by the remainder of the Members opposite in the coming days, is interesting because it was entirely predicted by the Chief Minister in his address.

Hon. D A Feetham: Because it's true! (*Laughter*)

20 **Hon. A J Isola:** Well, I will demonstrate to Mr Feetham why it is not true, (*Interjection*) and why, in fact, they should learn from themselves if it is true, because I am going to go back to 1996.

Hon. D A Feetham: Oh, my God!

25 **Hon. A J Isola:** Well, he says, 'Oh, my God!' but the only fire in the belly that I saw on the Opposition benches was when they talked about the riots in 1996. It is the only time the Leader of the Opposition had any emotion in his address, and that was a very long time ago. So let's look at what you promised in 1996, which I will come to before we start to talk about 'Oh, my God, going back to 1996', because they seem to enjoy doing it.

30 Mr Speaker, the Chief Minister said the Opposition will strike fear into the hearts of our citizens and he said that absolutely rightly – and again, to be honest, it was not difficult to predict because that is what they always do. Hon. Members opposite will remember, as we do, the great election on the LNG plant. We were all going to die: the bomb zone, the blast zone, the safety, the pamphlet they produced, Mr Feetham raising these papers about how dangerous this facility was going to be. Well, not surprisingly, the day after the election they never raised it again. It was not
35 that dangerous, it was not that unsafe, because they dropped it, like they were dropped at that very same election by our very intelligent electorate. So, like they do every year, they talk about the same issue; and not just one issue but a number of issues, but all with the same theme running

through them. They talk about secrecy, they talk about off balance sheet, they talk about the money that is in the companies. They have talked in the past but not yesterday, thankfully, about the Public Accounts Committee and why we should have one. *(Interjection)* Oh, I have no doubt, because they are that predictable that they would do it again. And so, if they need one. I would ask the hon. Member why they did not do one between 1996 and 2016 when it was in their manifesto in 1996. The answer, Mr Speaker, is that they say one thing and do something completely different when they are on this side of the House, **(Hon. Chief Minister: Hear, hear.)** but when they are on that side of the House they want what they call enhanced democracy. You couldn't make it up. I will come to some of those examples in a moment as to why it is so absolutely incredible that anybody should give them an ounce of credibility, because they never, ever do a policy. But when we are on this side of the House, 'Wakey, wakey, they've got to do it, even though we didn't do it.' That is the story of the GSD, as brilliantly exposed yesterday by the Leader of the Opposition yet again. In that respect at least they are consistent, if nothing else, because they have no policies that are consistent. Just in respect of when we come to talk about the Budget once a year, the line is like a scratched record: off we go again, off we go again. They have been playing it now for many years. In fact, from day one when we were taking over their own estimates, by their own definition we had to increase the borrowing limits, but it was our fault. Their credibility is just, unfortunately, not there.

So, like the Chief Minister said – I agree entirely – we deserve better opposition. Do you know the Opposition come at this time of year and tell us that the spending on the Health Authority is terrible? I have been in this Parliament looking after Health for just over 12 months. I have answered 185 questions on health. How many of those were on spending, overspending, waste? **(Hon. Chief Minister: Zero.)** None. Not one. How many of those were about doing more, providing more of this and more of that, why have you got more of these and why is the waiting list so long? Waiting lists can be fixed at the flick of a switch by spending more money. *(Interjection)* They want waiting lists reduced; well, so do I, but it is a question of a balance with what money you spend. A hundred and eighty five questions during the course of the year where they are able to scrutinise, which is their job, but they do not do it. How many questions? Nil. It is absolutely remarkable.

And so this is an Opposition with no plan, with too much opportunism, jumping on every single bandwagon they can see left, right and centre, in the hope that they will get some support from it, even if they subsequently roll back – because we are getting close to an election, that may not be popular; jump ship and jump on to something else. They change ideas like the wind. And they do not live up to their own mantra. Secrecy, off balance, Public Accounts Committee. Well, they only had 16 years. Perhaps you could take the view that that is not enough time. With the competence that they have in this Opposition, I would struggle to say that they did. I suspect they would not have enough time with another 16 years.

Mr Speaker, when you look at their position on the Budget, for the last few years it has become trendy for them to vote against. Addicted to debt, borrowing, lack of transparency, off balance sheet; the same every year. But they come at that at Budget time. I do not see any help from the alternative government – supposedly – in ideas as to what we should do in policies which we should take into consideration. *(Interjection)* Where are they? *(Interjection)* No, it is not about needing their help. That is the one thing we certainly do not need or want. *(Interjection)* Somebody who is putting themselves out to the public months away from a General Election and the public today have no idea what their policies are on anything does not sound, to me, like an alternative government in waiting.

The Leader of the Opposition said that Members on this side looked tired and jaded. He was not very convincing when he said that, I suspect because, like the rest of our community, they do not believe it to be true. I do not believe he believes it to be true for one second. But when I look at the Opposition, I do see a group of people who are tired, who are jaded, who are devoid of ideas, devoid of policies. Where is the innovation coming from on that side of the House? Where is it? We have yet to see it. And yet these are the people who want, tomorrow, to walk into a

90 treaty negotiation without a clue, without experience. What international negotiation have any of them done?

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): That is why they want to take us with them.

95 **Hon. A J Isola:** Well, it is the only hope we have got, if we do go with them. They have not negotiated a thing politically in their lives.

Hon. Member: Nor have you. (*Interjections*)

100 **Hon. A J Isola:** It is absolutely incredible to compare one with the other, but still we will humour them and we will continue with the lines that they believe are of value to our people.

Mr Speaker, in my first Budget address, 10 years ago, I said that in order to be in politics I felt you had to have a sense of humour, which I think we all do, and an ability to do the right thing for the right reasons, and I still stand very true to that. In that same first address I touched on a number of things at the time, which I have mentioned briefly. I said this:

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Mr Speaker, I quote from their 1996 manifesto:

‘House of Assembly; there will be regular and frequent meetings and question times... The House of Assembly must be the true expression of democracy at work in our community.’

– wonderful words, but of course they then spent the next 16 years walking a coach and horses straight through their expression of democracy; suddenly it did not matter anymore, it was gone –

They also call for a Public Accounts Committee [...] ‘to have oversight on how our money is being spent’. I quote from their 1996 manifesto:

‘We will appoint a Public Accounts Committee in the House of Assembly to scrutinise Government expenditure of your monies.’

110 That was their promise to the people in 1996, and after 16 years with the ability to do it, Mr Clinton is going to illuminate us all again tomorrow and tell us that we still need a Public Accounts Committee. Well, he should have persuaded the people in his own party, because they did not seem to share his view.

115 They talked at that time, in 2014, about enhanced democracy but had absolutely no intention, when given the chance, of doing anything to deliver it, nothing at all. And today there is no change. Members opposite have no energy, no ideas, no innovation, no hope. The truth is – and they know it – that everyone in this community knows that they are not a government in waiting. Everybody in this community hopes that this Chief Minister wins the next General Election and walks into new treaty discussions, because he and the Deputy Chief Minister are the only people in this community who can deliver it to us. They know that, as do their most ardent supporters, who I speak to and tell me exactly the same thing. (*Interjection*) Well, they will be telling you in the polls, of course they will.

120 Mr Speaker, in concluding that part, my view is that Gibraltar does indeed deserve a better Opposition, because the one we have unfortunately fails to scrutinise, fails to hold anyone in check, and of course fails beyond any sense of reasonableness to deliver any form of government in waiting, any policy, anything new. Nothing. Same old drum 12 years ago still today, no change, exactly the same.

125 The Chief Minister, in predicting the Hon. the Leader of the Opposition’s address, really did not have to do that much homework. On Tuesday, 18th April, the Leader of the Opposition wrote a piece in the *Chronicle* ‘In my opinion’ column, where curiously it says ‘by Keith Azopardi, Leader of the GSD and Lead of the Opposition’. I do not know if there was anything untoward in that funny title. I do not know if any of his colleagues on his left or right were interested in perhaps being the new lead. This is April of 2023. He starts off:

I can't help but think we are in a dark Gibraltar – darker than we have been in for a long time.

I wonder where he was going under the title 'The need for a new way'. He pulls back the 1996 election campaign and goes back to exactly the same place. That is the new way. The new way is going back to 1996. It is absolutely incredible. No wonder they are devoid of ideas, with no innovation, no energy. They are going back. They are not looking forward.

Hon. Chief Minister: That is why he said back to the future.

Hon. A J Isola: Back to the future, yes, very good.
Mr Speaker:

In 1996 we fought an election which we thought was a crossroads [...] we were campaigning against a lack of accountability ...

Yes, they were, but what did they do about it? Did he deliver the Public Accounts Committee that he promised in that manifesto? No. Was he worried about it? Of course not, because he never did it.

So what are these people coming and talking to us about? The setting up of opaque structures, the same opaque structures that they left in place for 16 years and ran with off-balance-sheet accounting, with PFI loans off the balance sheet. (**Hon. R M Clinton:** Once.) No, not once. No, your memory is failing you, Mr Clinton. (*Interjection*) Car parks, a couple of them, hospitals. (*Interjection*) Well, we got more than one car park, so – (*Interjection*) Two car parks. So there are more than just the Hospital.

Hon. Chief Minister: You are saying there is only one company borrowing. Seriously? I have given you a lesson on this for years.

Hon. A J Isola: But they never listen. And then, of course, his great phrase 'the financial jungle'. He actually came up with that in April because he says, 'If we complained in 1996 about a GSLP web of companies it was a thin veil compared to the veritable jungle of opacity of structures created since 2012.' The 'jungle'. So not even the jungle is new. In the great financial debacle that we face, not even the jungle is new; it was there in April. So in April he wrote his Budget speech. And as I said before, when he came to this House yesterday and talked about the 1996 riots, it was the first time we have seen any fire in his belly. The rest of his speech, with the greatest of respect to him, was boring, absolutely boring. Why? Because he could have read it last year. Mr Speaker, there are parts of his speech last year which are almost identical to this year, almost identical. I read it and I had to go back and check. I thought, 'This cannot be already in *Hansard*.' It was only yesterday. Identical. His analysis of the spending is identical to what he said last year, absolutely identical, and this is where the 10 years of financial ruin, the Armageddon, the addicted to debt, the opaqueness, the secretive ... It just falls apart. It falls apart when you put in the Hospital, the car parks, the company debts, the company borrowing, which they themselves did. Or is that fiction, too?

And then the Leader of the Opposition says the surplus could be wiped out at a moment's notice. Whoosh! Gone! Two million can be wiped out at a moment's notice. That is disingenuous. The hon. Member has been in this House for many, many years and he has a lot of experience of sitting in this Parliament, and especially at Budget time, so he knows that some things go up and some things go down, and some of the things that go up are often good things. I am going to give one example: gaming, an area that I am responsible for. In 2020-21, we had pay as you earn Social Insurance and corporate tax of £76 million. You budget prudently for the forthcoming year. In 2021-22, the following year, £97 million – a significant jump, a very good jump. Congratulations. And then in 2022-23 it goes up from £97 million to £125 million. So it is not just whoosh, quite

175 simply – as the hon. Member knows full well it isn't – because these are what we all know:
estimates. These are estimates of revenue and expenditure and we do our best to estimate for
the forthcoming year, but as the hon. Members know, when it comes to health, it is not very easy
to estimate what we are going to be doing, especially in areas such as sponsored patients and
others. But even more so in one area that the hon. Member the Leader of the Opposition referred
180 to yesterday, where he said, again, the figures last year were hopelessly out. He was talking about
the GEA and the GHA in care. The figures on the GEA were hopelessly out last year because at the
time the Book went to print, Russia had just invaded Ukraine and the impact that that had on fuel
costs I hope we all know. But the estimates were right at the time they went to print. So for the
Leader of the Opposition to come and tell us that the figures last year were hopelessly out – well,
185 yes, but not through our design, not through our miscalculation, but because something happened
in between which has thrown the cost of fuel exponentially higher than it was at the time those
estimates were prepared. So, if the Opposition is to have any credibility, then in my view they
have to be at least honest in how they deal with these changes.

Mr Speaker, a number of instances which, to me, demonstrate the lack of credibility that this
190 Opposition have, I would just refer to briefly. When the OS35 incident happened, the GSD issued
a press release very quickly afterwards, questioning everything that was happening:

It has been reported

– this is the GSD –

that while the back-up resources from Oil Spill Response Limited have been called upon the equipment would not
arrive in Gibraltar till Sunday. This makes no sense when the risk of an oil spill was there from the outset. The
mobilisation of equipment should have been arranged so that this was already in Gibraltar and could be deployed
immediately at will.

And:

The vessel itself was located off Catalan Bay even though the collision had not occurred there. Given that decision
it was paramount that oil spill response measures were taken to effectively and entirely ringfence the vessel from
the surrounding area [...]

The pumping out of the fuel has started this afternoon. Again, why this could not have started earlier is
questionable.

195 Almost immediately, Members opposite jumping on the political bandwagon to have a crack. It is
a little bit different from the collegiate approach they talk about when they come to this
Parliament and tell us, 'We want to work together in Gibraltar's interests.' The ship had barely
been lowered and sunk before they started issuing press releases criticising the manner in which
the OS35 was being managed. Then, more recently, Mr Bossino issues a press release or a tweet:

The immediate worry is to our environment and the fact that we are entering the Easter break, when there is
expected to be increased use of our beaches. The GSD will continue to monitor developments.

I have to say that I find that approach, that style, totally uncollegiate and unhelpful at a time
when, if anything, what the hon. Members opposite should have been doing was congratulating
200 the Captain of the Port for the best demonstration ever in our history of how to deal with a wreck
which could have caused huge damage to our environment and huge damage to us, not just
domestically but internationally and politically, too. (*Banging on desks*) So from where I sit, I
congratulate the Captain of the Port and his team and the Minister for the incredible work they
did to have averted a complete disaster in our community, and I think we all owe them a huge
205 debt of gratitude. (**Hon. Chief Minister:** Hear, hear.)

The Hon. Leader of the Opposition yesterday spoke about lost opportunities, concessions and
failures in respect of the treaty. He really has no idea. The treaty would have been easy to do, of

210 course. The Chief Minister and the Deputy Chief Minister could have popped over, signed whatever was put in front of them and come back and said what a great deal it was. That is not the way we work. If anyone is going to stand up to defend Gibraltar's interests, Gibraltar's red lines, it is this Chief Minister and this Deputy Chief Minister, (*Banging on desks*) and yet there is a tweet from my friend Mr Phillips – he must have known this was coming:

The continued uncertainty about Gibraltar's place in a post-Brexit world is damaging to familial and commercial relationships across our borders. People are tired and fed up of spin, lousy press conferences and statements which say nothing. They need more time to polish the deal. The imagery we saw today of the hugs and handshakes between the two foreign ministers who essentially said, 'Let's talk some more,' did little to reassure anyone.

215 Well, that is a cracking way to start a diplomatic process, by slagging off the two foreign ministers you are going to work with to try to reach a deal. That's clever. It is called diplomacy and clearly they do not understand the first thing about it. But then he goes on a little bit further:

If the GSLP Liberal Government cannot negotiate a safe, secure and beneficial deal in the time and space we have all given them, then they need to give way to the people who can.

220 Good God, help us, please! Even the most fanatical GSD supporter knows that is absolutely not true and indeed is something that puts the fear of God up many GSD supporters as we approach an election with the treaty not having been completed as yet. Again, 'collegiate politics, all in this together, all working together' – first opportunity, off he goes, criticising the foreign ministers of Spain and the United Kingdom and then saying, 'Let me talk to them.' Wow!

225 And then the final one is probably the largest land deal in Gibraltar's history, the Eastside deal. If we were in financial ruin, if we were in the place they say we are and we announced that we are receiving £90 million, surely they would be jumping up and down saying, 'Fantastic news! Wow, well done! Congratulations!' That is what I expect from collegiate and friendly people who are only interested in Gibraltar's best interests – of course. They issued press release after press release challenging the purchaser, the source of funds, whether the appropriate checks have been done, who had paid the money. 'Confirmation needed on source of moneys' – a press release from the Members opposite, when they should have been celebrating the incredible agreement that had been negotiated over a long period of time. Again, a long period of time because if it takes time to get to the right place, time it will take.

230 The Hon. Leader of the Opposition, who has now arrived – and I am grateful he has come in to listen to a few of my bits about him –

235 **Hon. K Azopardi:** If the hon. Member gives way, I just want to say I love to listen to the hon. Member, so I do not want him to interpret any discourtesy on my part. I was just on radio and walking here. It is, what, the time that it takes, but I will certainly go back and listen to everything he has said so far.

240 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Listen to this on the radio.

Hon. A J Isola: Mr Speaker, no, that was not my intention, in saying that, at all. I was merely welcoming him to the Chamber. I was not making any other suggestion and I am sure he will enjoy listening back to what has been said thus far.

245 The Hon. Leader of the Opposition made a number of points which I have already dealt with, some of them, but there are a number of others that I want to talk through. He consistently referred to taxing the people more. In fact, the Chief Minister announced yesterday that the extra 2% was being reduced to 1% for all those earning less than £100,000 – so we are not taxing people more; actually, we are reducing the burden of tax in respect of all those below – and he also announced measures to provide more support within the public sector, obviously because the

250 private sector have been having their increases over the past years, which the public sector have not.

He made a statement which was ‘years of playing poker with the people’s money’. Playing poker, Mr Speaker. Let’s talk a bit about that poker, because what this Government has been doing, and it has unashamedly done it, is invest in Gibraltar, in our infrastructure, which when we
 255 came in, in 2011, was in a desperate state, so much so that by the end of this term there will not be a single school that has not been built by us because of the decrepit state they were left in when we arrived in 2011. Rebuilding of schools – is that poker? Is that a gamble? Really? The education of our children, is that a gamble? Is that what he means by ‘playing poker with the people’s money’? Or is it the improved health services, the new things that we are doing for the
 260 GHA that we did not previously do? Is that poker? Or the sports facilities? Or the 50/50 homes? Or the extra domiciliary care, where we have invested significantly more than they left us? Or sponsored patients? Or the parks? Well, no, hang on, not the parks, because the hon. Members will recall that when this Government came into office in 2011, one of the first things that the Chief Minister did was renegotiate the concrete jungle – if I can use that word ‘jungle’ again – that
 265 they had authorised and given permission to, to ensure that we had a park in the heartbeat and the centre of our city. Was that poker? Was that a gamble? Well, it can’t have been, because we did not pay a penny. The taxpayer did not spend a penny. Or the other parks? Commonwealth Park? Possibly. I do not think anybody in our community would agree that that new Commonwealth Park was poker or a gamble. Indeed, that, too, was in large part sponsored by a
 270 philanthropic company.

Mr Speaker, can I just ask, in order to understand where the gamble is and where the poker is, could they, once and for all, tell us where it is that they would not have spent the money? It is easy to say, ‘You have spent all this money,’ but where is it? In health? In education? In care? Where wouldn’t they have spent the money? The hon. Member, yesterday, referred to the GEA.
 275 I have already dealt with the point about the increased cost of fuel. Does he suggest we do not pay the increased cost of the fuel and leave no lights on? This is a cost that is unavoidable. They know that, so how can they come to this House and talk to us about the GEA figures last year being hopelessly out? They were not. They were accurate at that time. So why can’t they say where it is that the gamble was? I can tell them where I think they played poker and lost: with the
 280 loans of £7 million; with the Theatre Royal; with the Airport at four times the budget. That is poker, that is a gamble, and they lost the game. Tell us where we have. We have always invested in our people, our services and our infrastructure, and we shall not shy from continuing to do that.

The hon. Member then talks about the hidden hundreds of millions in the financial jungle – the same term he referenced in his article in the *Chronicle* in April – all saved by higher taxes. And then he also mentioned the increase in cost for electricity, which was last year; it did not increase
 285 this year, we left it where it was. But that was still increased taxation because he has to build the story: the ‘continuing opaqueness and the fiction’, ‘Don’t buy the rosy headlines, no point pretending otherwise,’ ‘Tell our people the full picture.’ Promises, promises. Same old story: opaqueness, secrecy ... And, yes, in 1996 when they had the chance to deal with each of those
 290 same statements, and after being in government for 16 years, they still had no Public Accounts Committee, they still had off balance sheet increased on steroids from when they came into government, still continued to use all of the companies because they saw the sense in using companies. And yet when we do it, it is not okay. ‘We can do it, but you can’t, because we can’t trust you. We trust ourselves.’ Well, Mr Speaker, I do not trust them because in 1996 they made
 295 promise after promise and never delivered.

When you think of all of these issues, which do not sit well with their view, which talk about a mountain of debt and overspending, and then in the same breath he talks about tax reductions ... He is talking about tax reductions, he is talking about welcoming all the new AA vacancies, more
 300 cost, so we are in this incredible position where we get pushed over the four years to do this and do more and do that and do this, and yet they come once a year and tell us we are spending too much money. Well, Mr Speaker, maybe they are magicians, because I cannot understand how on

earth we can do more in health services or we can do more in care or more in our schools, like welcoming all the new AA vacancies the Hon. the Leader of the Opposition did yesterday, and yet be against more spending, because of course there is a cost to more AAs. They do not want us to spend more money but they welcome the AAs. I clearly went to a different maths school to the one he did, because I just cannot make those numbers add up. But of course he still talks about tax breaks: tax reductions are coming. Can things be that bad? Can we be addicted to debt? Can we be overspending ... that he is talking about tax reductions? Or is it just that the Chief Minister announced the 1% reduction for people earning less than £100,000 yesterday and he wants to say that he is going to play that game too? I find it incredible to see the total lack of a consistent approach from the Members opposite, a total lack of innovation of thinking. Nothing new – it is tired, it is bored, it is finished. We are just here, waiting, to hope that we limp in again to opposition. It is just not good enough, really just not good enough.

I have had the privilege of being responsible for the GHA for just over 12 months, and before I start to talk about the GHA I would like to announce that the new CEO of the GHA, Mr Kevin McGee OBE, will be joining us from 1st October and that Patrick Geoghegan will continue until 30th September, to ensure that there is somebody driving the bus throughout the entire period. We are very fortunate to have Mr Kevin McGee, and a press release will be issued today giving some of his background. He looks after a whole series of hospitals in the north of England and he has been with the NHS for over 35 years. He brings a mountain of experience and especially in turning round hospitals in special measures to outstanding performance in the UK – two that he deals with, two of the many hospitals that he looks after. So his ability to improve the quality I think will be most welcome in Gibraltar.

I have to say thank you to Patrick Geoghegan, an extraordinary man who, with stage 4 prostate cancer, continues to work day in, day out, and has, throughout the entire period, continued to work day in, day out. I have continued my regular meetings with him on Teams. I met him in London – some time back when he was there having chemotherapy – for two hours, and I asked him, ‘So when do you start your chemo?’ He said, ‘I’ve already started.’ He was in the middle of his chemo and he spent two hours with me, going through, in excruciating detail, all the aspects of the GHA that we were working on. The man is absolutely extraordinary. I have never seen anything like it in my life. When you talk about vocation, that is what he has got. He has an absolute desire to improve the Hospital in every sense of the word and we have been very fortunate to have him with us in the time that we have, and I look forward to saying goodbye properly close to the time when he will cease to be working with us and Kevin comes in.

Mr Speaker, I also must thank the senior team at the GHA, the board and, indeed, the Care Agency for the incredible work they do day in, day out. I have never appreciated the extent of the work that the GHA and our care services put in, the breadth of service that we provide, the quality of the service they deliver. The extent of the care for a community with 32,000 people is absolutely incredible and I want to thank each and every one of them – and there are a lot of them – for doing the incredible work that they do.

Over the last 12 months we have done external reviews; recommendations in orthopaedics, maternity and dentistry; *[inaudible]* approvals in orthopaedics, endoscopy and ophthalmology; a new clinical governance structure, mental health strategy and dementia strategy, with the appointment of the new dementia co-ordinator; collaboration with charities to promote health awareness across a whole range of different elements; the standardisation of the GHA drug formulary, which you know has already been announced; a multi-agency strategy; the re-establishment of the Tertiary Referral Board; the new estate strategy to tell us how we are using the space. The proposed front of the Hospital, bringing together the PCC and St Bernard’s Hospital, is a result of that estate strategy. The idea came from the expert who helped us to think through how we could make better use of space. To be able to have all of our waiting areas in the Hospital in one space, to be able to have the PCC and St Bernard’s having their waiting areas in the same space with digital check-in and enhanced seating for our senior citizens and pensioners, just accommodating for the people that we have and at the same time creating a new administration

355 area on the mezzanine floor for the entirety of the Hospital I think is going to be fantastic, and
again only made possible through the donations of our people and our businesses to enable that
to happen.

In the past 12 months, the new Minor Injuries Unit, which is doing remarkable work right
beside A&E ... People go in and come out having waited, been seen and leaving within 30 minutes
for minor injuries. It is absolutely incredible how that has been born and how it is operating. The
360 new neonatal stabilisation pathway. The opening of the CHE for routine GP appointments for
children. The new PCC appointments booking system. Remember that? How many times have we
been challenged in this House on the appalling booking systems at the GHA and the PCC? No
longer: fixed. The new pre-anaesthetic assessment department, new pathways for fractured hips,
365 new spinal pathway, the first ever cooling transfer of neonatal to Malaga – the first in Andalusia
as well – the new domestic abuse strategy, the new IVF policy, the new urology one-stop clinic, all
done, new services, improved services available at our very own Hospital. And I am only picking
through some of them because there are too many to mention. We have the new TSSU; the new
ENT unit; the new Philips radiation [*inaudible*] for MES; the new diagnostic equipment for
endoscopy, for theatre stacks, for ENT equipment; the new rapid response vehicle; the new
370 mobile health unit, trundling around our community serving people in their own residential areas;
the new diagnostic ultrasound in A&E; an incredible amount of training going on in the Hospital;
new practitioners in the PCC and the Treatment Unit; a new nurse practitioner in sexual health; a
new nurse practitioner in respiratory medicine; a new junior doctor contract; the new
appointment of a dementia co-ordinator. Cannabis training phase one is being completed. Clinical
375 governance.

What about the plans for the future: the new front entrance project and the new dental waiting
list initiative. There are, in fact, two important strategic documents to come out in respect of
waiting times, which are going to be our waiting times and our clinical waiting times with a new
strategic document to be published shortly. The opening of the new 111 clinic and adviser desk
380 and ambulance dispatch; the new ambulance fleet; the new operating theatre; the new mortuary.
I am delighted to tell hon. Members that within the first couple of weeks we will have two of the
three viewing rooms ready and open in the new mortuary at St Bernard's Hospital, which will be
placed where the chapel used to be placed within the hospital building. I am hugely grateful to
the Catholic Church for agreeing to move their chapel elsewhere within the premises. The Bishop
385 has been totally supportive and we are deeply grateful to him for enabling that to happen and to
have the new viewing rooms in the mortuary as early as August. Services will start on the new
cath lab, CT scanner, two X-ray rooms, fluoroscopy rooms, and of course, as the Chief Minister
mentioned, the movement of the Coaling Island facility to St Bernard's as we turn the page on
separating mental health and physical health and bring them together within St Bernard's
390 Hospital.

Mr Speaker, out of curiosity, which of those would the GSD not have done? Which of those
would the GSD stop? If they are telling us that we spend too much money in the GHA, which of
those that I have just referred to – and that is just a sample – would they not have done? Would
they not have done the domestic abuse or the dementia strategy and appointed the new
395 dementia co-ordinator? Would they not have done the new TSS unit so we can do more
operations and be assured in terms of the sterilisation of all of our equipment in the Hospital,
reducing risk for our patients? Would they not have done that? What is it they would not have
done? Where is the consistency? If you are telling us to stop spending money in the GHA, tell us
where. Otherwise, it is a completely unfair manner of dealing with this Budget debate.

400 In respect of the Care Agency, Carlos and April and Angelo, I have already mentioned the
breadth of work that they all do. It is absolutely staggering. I have been through the various places
that we have, where we service our users, with His Excellency the Governor and more recently
with the Chief Minister. It is staggering, the quality and the professionalism of the work that they
do. And again, I do not do it justice by fleetingly referring to pieces, Mr Speaker, so I will, at the
405 end of my speech, be giving out a report which goes into a little bit more detail in respect of all of

the other areas that I am dealing with. But Disability Services, St Bernadette's, Adult Services, court protection, Bruce's Farm, the Waterport Day Centre, the Family Services, the Children's Services – in each and every area in which our fabulous team at the Care Agency work, there is professionalism and there is quality, and I have to say how proud I am to be looking after them and having responsibility for them over the past 12 months.

Mr Speaker, in respect of ITLD I have to thank Tyrone and Jonathan for their work this past year. They have spent a huge amount of time this year on security, quite rightly. They have also spent a lot of time on software development and replacing our infrastructure, replacement of data centre hardware, replacement of public key infrastructure, replacement of law courts audio visual systems and growth of the government secure intranet through new fibre connections. And importantly, I am delighted to report that despite the issues that we have had in the past 12 months, I am grateful to them because we are working together well. They are responding professionally. The entire team at ITLD is working closely with us and the results will bear fruit. The whole infrastructure of everything that Government does, whether it is in security software or hardware, is managed and run professionally by our team at ITLD, and I am grateful to Tyrone, Jonathan and the rest of the team for the work that they do.

Digital services, too, Mr Speaker. We continue to work through, despite the criticism from the naysayers and the doomsters across the floor, processing over 60,000 invoices per year digitally; upcoming deployment of Infor Global Human Resources; the entire financial package across the whole of Government now digitally prepared; the integration of HR functions, employee records, time and attendance, leave management and more, all will be coming online very shortly. We have 33,000 fully ID-verified users able to access e-services. Sixty eight per cent of tax returns last year were filed online, and this year with the new app I have no doubt that many more will do so. We are processing over 160,000 applications online and taking some £70,000 a month in respect of payments for those services. I am hugely grateful to the team that has helped to deliver this: Julian, Karen, Stuart, Justin and Heath amongst many others who work with us to deliver these services. So my sincere thanks to Digital Services and ITLD, who are working so well together in delivering quicker, better for the rest of our community as we continue our journey into the digital world.

In respect of online gambling, I am delighted to report that we are in rude health. Thirteen new B2B firms have been licensed in the past 12 months. I gave, earlier, the increase in tax, Social Insurance and corporate tax that we have received each year in respect of the gaming industry, and I am confident that those will continue to grow. In 2011, we had 26 operators; we now have 46 operators. In 2011, we had about two and a half thousand people working in the industry, direct employment; today we have over 3,700 people working in the industry. That is despite Brexit, when you know that the entirety of our European business was taken away. We have still held the operators and the jobs, which is absolutely remarkable, so my thanks to the gaming industry for their professionalism and continued work. My thanks, of course, also to Andrew Lyman and his team at the regulator, who do remarkable work. I mentioned the number before of £127 million, I believe it was, in tax receipts from this industry last year. If you add on to that the £14 million-odd in licensing and regulatory fees, and it cost us less than £1 million for the entire gambling office to look after all of our operators, I think they deserve a huge pat on the back for their efficiency and professionalism during the year. We will continue to work on poker AML as we move forward, and of course we will shortly be publishing the new Gambling Bill, which has taken us so long – held up through Brexit, held up through COVID – but now we are finally at the end of that process and I very much hope to be able to produce that Bill. I am grateful to the gambling regulators, to the three Peters and a number of others who have helped us to deliver that work.

On financial services – again, I am just literally touching on some of the areas – we have done remarkably well this past 12 months and I would like just to highlight a couple of areas which I think are relevant. Clearly, the most important piece of work within the Ministry is the ongoing discussion with His Majesty's Treasury in London, the FCA, the PRA and the GFC and my office as

we work towards the delivery of GAR, which should be coming through next year. We are preparing for the sectoral assessments, which will happen in the coming months, and we continue to work studiously in respect of alignment of our legislation and our regulatory outcomes.

In DLT, 36 firms, over 100 people directly employed in the sector – apart, of course, from the work that is done through all of our lawyers, our accountants and our other professionals dealing with servicing the industry. I am very grateful to Paul Astengo for his leadership in this respect, and especially for having got that 10th core principle out last year on market manipulation – again, the first in the world in this space.

On insurance, I am pleased to report that total gross premium income in 2022 reached £7 billion through Gibraltar firms for the first time ever. It is a staggering amount of money that our insurance businesses are writing through Gibraltar, and so it will be no surprise that two of the big four accounting firms estimate that Gibraltar’s motor insurance collective share the UK motor market exceeded 30% for the first time in 2022. It is incredible what a jurisdiction like ours can do when you specialise in an area like we have done. And so what is the objective? To use that knowledge, that expertise, and use it to grow other areas of insurance. That is what we must do to seek to diversify that insurance base. I can tell this House that in the area of pet insurance, 20% of UK pet insurance is intermediated through Gibraltar companies. Nobody has ever heard of that before. *(Interjection)* I will arrange some insurance for him, if the hon. Member wants. I can understand why people do want to insure him, but I am happy to help him get some insurance. *(Laughter)*

Hon. Chief Minister: He will have to have a risk assessment.

Hon. A J Isola: Mr Speaker, 20%. Again, my congratulations to the industry.

And again, another new area, travel intermediation, is close to 30% of the UK market written from Gibraltar. This is an interesting one because I know the Chief Minister will remember when we were in the throes of COVID and we were working through the BEAT system and working out how it would work, we always said financial services and gaming do not need a penny. There was one sector that did, and I think the hon. Member may recall himself the travel insurance intermediaries, who ... Travelling stopped. Not only did they have no money coming in, but they had to repay premiums in respect of those that had been issued. They had a serious problem, and so they appealed to Government and the Chief Minister at the time agreed that we would provide financial support in order to ensure that these businesses did not go down. Well, they did not go down and today they are writing close to 30% of the UK travel insurance intermediation business, which I think shows the extent to which the BEAT measures during COVID were calculated, thought through and incredibly well delivered, because that is a result of that work.

We have had a new insurer recently domiciled from Malta in record time to provide a new line of business in Gibraltar. We will be passing, through this Parliament later on in this session, a Bill dealing with another type of insurance rating scheme of arrangement, which again is an important business that we wish to keep. And then, of course, we are currently working on a new business, which is the life business. I talked about seeking to diversify and the need to continue to diversify in the insurance sector. We have a new life business that is currently going through an application with the regulator, and if that comes through – and I hope it does, but obviously it is in the hands of the regulator – it will be a first important big step in terms of diversifying our insurance base. I am told that we have the longest pipeline of new business at the FCC in insurance in 10 years, so I am very pleased to say that in financial services we continue to go well.

We will be setting up, over the course of the next 12 months, the new Insurance Insolvency Fund. We have to do that. We also have a working group going, on insurance non-UK captive regime, where we are almost there in terms of the regulator and the private sector working together to bring it to fruition. We have a working group on Cat2s. We have a working group on the Companies Act, to see how we can best reform it. We have a working group on QROPS, to see how we can design, with very minor tweaks of our legislation, an attractive new proposition for

510 qualifying non-UK recognised pension schemes. And of course we will carry on working with GAR
and we will carry on working with our DLT community and with our educational institutions to see
how we can improve what is available there. We are also launching a Gibraltar alumni in financial
services, working in London to try to rekindle that link that we started pre COVID with
515 Gibraltarians working in the City. We are also looking at artificial intelligence, and I am pleased to
say that we are developing a strategy in partnership with the Ministry for the Environment and
Sustainability on sustainable finance, and I hope that that we will be able to publish shortly.

We are also going through, as hon. Members will know, a sort of restructure of the Finance
Centre as a result of the departure of James Tipping, Mike Ashton and Timothy Haines. Mr Tipping
has been with us for over 20 years. He has been instrumental in leading Gibraltar through the
520 repositioning of our financial services community, going back to the Tax Information Exchange
Agreements, OECD and IMF reviews, FATF, UK, GAR and Brexit. He has been there and held our
hand through that entire process, and I am deeply grateful to him for the incredible work that he
has done for Gibraltar, and continues to do because he agreed with me, when he told me he was
leaving, to continue to work for us for nothing for 12 months, especially in the areas that relate to
525 Treasury, GAR and the UK relationship. I am extremely grateful to him, as I am to Mike and to Tim
for the excellent work that they have done in their respective areas. I am grateful, too, to John
Paul Fa, who has stepped into that frame and been hugely supportive in the short time that he
has been with us, not just in this but in a whole host of other areas. Paul Astengo I have already
mentioned. Kerry and the SNT team at the FSC have been brilliant, as has, of course, Julian
530 Sacarello in respect of GAR and the ongoing work with the United Kingdom. I am grateful also to
the Finance Centre Council current president, Shaun Cawdery for his work. I look forward to
working with him in the future, in particular in respect of the selection of the new CEO of the
Finance Centre, where I have asked him to come in with us and participate in the process of
selecting the new positions.

535 At the GEA, a huge amount of work is going on this year: 12 km of high-voltage cabling from
Waterport to the new Eastside development, and we are going to start the preparatory
commissioning works of the battery energy storage (BES), which is critical for our future power
supplies. This is what will step in whenever there is a failure. It is just a very big battery, which will
last up to an hour and provide a significant amount of power. You will see some expressions of
540 interest being issued shortly in respect of that BES. We will commence the decommissioning and
removal of the North Mole temporary power plant as and when the BES comes in. We can finally,
to the joy of the Chief Minister, rid ourselves of those caterpillars and move on to have more
reliable, sustainable power.

AquaGib – the Chief Minister has already mentioned the ongoing works there. They were
545 brilliant during the Powers Drive ... To lose the water that we did last summer and to provide the
alternatives that they did within the period that they did was really quite remarkable. I am pleased
to say that we have now more than catered for that loss of supply. We are in better shape than
we ever have been with our water stocks and, more importantly, our ability to produce, and I am
very grateful to Paul and the senior team at AquaGib for their work in doing that. They are also
550 working on the new AquaGib headquarters, where we will have a series of new RO plants at North
Mole adjacent to the GEA facility.

The Gibraltar International Bank – Lawrence Podesta has been with us from day one. A huge
thanks to him for what he has done. He was responsible for the set-up, the development and the
success of the bank and I will always be grateful. I have said this many times before to him. I am
555 delighted to welcome Peter Horton, our new CEO, who is absolutely brilliant and I am really
pleased that the GIB is in very good and safe hands. The work they have done recently in respect
of mortgages is of note and I think requires special mention.

I must thank, of course, my personal office – Karl Triay, Gareth Flower and Natalie Alvarez, who
look after me, with no fuss, incredibly well and keep me smiling even at the worst of times, and I
560 am eternally grateful to them for all of the excellent work that they do.

In closing, Mr Speaker, I will again draw from the inspirational words of our Chief Minister. We keep Gibraltar safe. I do not think there is a Government in the history of this community that has had to face the challenges that we have faced. The thought of a new Member waddling in to a negotiation in Brussels, Madrid or London is just terrifying because what this Chief Minister has done, firstly with Brexit ... Let's break it up into little pieces. Whoever would have thought that the Government of Gibraltar would be able to negotiate and enter into an agreement in a document – that is when the tough times come – on tobacco pricing, when that has been the bane of our lives for I do not know how many years? It is absolutely remarkable. That is skill, that is diplomacy, and the ability to do that in order to get the Withdrawal Agreement ... And let's remember, when you talk about the Withdrawal Agreement, the only reason that today our passports are not being stamped every single day, threatening the fluidity at our border for our workers and our tourists, is because of that Withdrawal Agreement which the Chief Minister negotiated. We take it for granted. We all think that the treaty is the success. We are the only patch in the world that can access Schengen with a Gibraltar ID card. If that is not evidence of diplomatic skill at its highest level, I just do not know what is. But that is not enough. To actually enter into a Withdrawal Agreement and then to enter into a tax treaty with the United Kingdom ... Before Mr Clinton jumps up ... Why has Gibraltar never had a tax treaty with the United Kingdom before? This Chief Minister walks in and out of Downing Street and visits the Prime Minister almost at leisure. How many times did the Chief Minister of that Government across the floor in 16 years visit No. 10? How many times? One, two, five, 10?. Nil. Never. How many times did hon. Members meet with the Foreign Secretary? They probably did not have a phone call. The relationship that Gibraltar today enjoys with the United Kingdom, enjoys with Spain and enjoys with Brussels is down to one thing only, let's be absolutely clear: the diplomatic skills of this Chief Minister. That is the reason why we have what we have. And many of the GSD supporters who I know well always say to me, 'Look, love him or hate him, you've got to give it to him. How the heck is he able to do that?' But he does, not once, not twice, not three times, but every single time. So when he says we keep Gibraltar safe, my God, we do.

A tax treaty with Spain. Ten years ago when I came into this job, if somebody had said we were going to try to negotiate a tax treaty with Spain, I would have thought, 'You're mad. To think about it you must be mad.' To actually attempt it, negotiate it and deliver it is absolutely incredible. It is absolutely incredible. When the people who have said everything they have about what this community is ... when they were in government ... they are the ones with the diplomatic skills – of course they are. We delivered each and every time. The Chief Minister delivered each and every time, with the support, of course, of the Deputy Chief Minister, the Attorney General and the rest of the negotiating team.

Mr Speaker, I can hear all the mumbles. I know they do not like it. And do you know what? I do not care that they do not like it, because this is what the people need to understand: the truth. *(Interjections)*

D J Bossino: We are loving it.

Hon. A J Isola: Oh, you are loving it? Well, I am sure you, like the rest of the community, hopes he carries on negotiating, because that is what I would love, too, like they do. *(Interjections)*

Mr Speaker, to think that financial services firms in Gibraltar can passport – *(Interjection)* I will go back a bit because they are not listening. I will wait. *(Interjections)*

Hon. Chief Minister: Girls, girls.

A Member: Sorry.

610 **Mr Speaker:** I think, with all respect ... I know you are enjoying it, but enough is enough. Let us moderate our – (*Interjection*)

Hon. A J Isola: [*Inaudible*] and I went to see the Chief Minister, as did the GBGA, the Finance Centre Council, the Chamber of Commerce in those early days. We saw them all because we
 615 fronted up and we faced up to the challenges that we faced. The number-one wish was, ‘Do you think you can get us access to the UK financial services market?’ and he said, ‘We’ll give it a go.’ We knew that a big chunk of our business was with the UK. We did not know how much, but we knew a big chunk of our business was with the UK. We thought we would be more successful in
 620 Europe than the 7% or 8% that we subsequently found out, but over 90% of our business was with the UK. It was fundamental. It was critical. This Chief Minister delivered that Gibraltar firms can access the UK financial services market. The only bit of territory in the world that has passporting rights into the United Kingdom, into the City of London, is Gibraltar. The only one. No one else has that. The Chief Minister delivered that. I thought it was impossible. When he came back and said, ‘I think there is a chance,’ I thought, ‘Oh my God, if you are able to do that, we are able to retain
 625 the financial services business that we have,’ and as I have told you before, look at our insurance space today. Despite Brexit, despite COVID, 30% of the market. If we put in the infrastructure for them to work, the professionals will make it work. That is what the Chief Minister gave them, the infrastructure for them to be able to go out, do their business, employ more people, pay more taxes, and that is what they are doing. It is a keystone of our industry, the insurance market. If
 630 they could not write into England, they would not be here. Let’s be clear what we are talking about. They would not be here. They would have gone. They are only here because of him. It is the only reason they are here. Can we do the same with gambling? We have the MoU between DCMS, the Gambling Commission and Gibraltar. Absolutely remarkable. I remember talking at the time to the greatest Gibraltarian of all time, who said to me, (*Interjection*) ‘If you can get access
 635 to the UK market for our financial services firms and our gaming firms, that would be incredible.’ And it was, and he did, and it is incredible, and that is what is making us continue to thrive in financial services in our community. So let’s not come with this nonsense that the Members opposite have the ability to walk in and negotiate these deals with however many counterparties there are. Indeed, Mr Phillips’ tweet would suggest that they have no idea of how to enter into
 640 diplomacy, by taking the mickey out of the two foreign secretaries that you are going to want to go and negotiate with, in his press release and his tweet.

And then, of course, we come to COVID. The leadership of this Government, of this Chief Minister, of Samantha in Civil Contingencies and in Health, each of my colleagues in their own
 645 areas working together – and, to be fair, the Members opposite who worked with us in those meetings – with the entire community coming together: that is Gibraltar at its best under the leadership that made it happen. When I look back and I look at the lessons learnt that we are going through now – and we will be shortly announcing the COVID inquiry – we want to learn how we can get better. We do. We genuinely do. But my God, we did a pretty damn good job. We saved lives every day of the week – absolutely remarkable – especially our senior citizens. Talking
 650 to the next CEO of the Hospital, who we shared some reflections with on COVID, he talked about how senior citizens there were just decimated. Not here. In that first phase, nothing. That only happened because of the work that was done to ensure that it did not happen.

Even on the deadly boring subject of NNO, which we all hate, the Deputy Chief Minister has worked day in, day out to ensure that if the deal treaty cannot happen, we are as well prepared
 655 as we possibly can be for what none of us want to happen. That is leadership, that is work, that is detail. That is watching every single ... dotting every i, crossing every t, making sure that we have every single part of everything covered. Members opposite should honestly ask themselves a simple question: who would you trust to negotiate our future? For me, and I think the vast majority of our community, the answer is very simple: it is this Chief Minister and I have absolutely
 660 no hesitation in saying he will keep Gibraltar safe.

Mr Speaker, I am pleased to commend the Bill to the House. (*Banging on desks*)

Mr Speaker: The Hon. Vijay Daryanani.

665 **Hon. A J Isola:** Mr Speaker, if I may, there is a report being circulated that I would like to take
as read, which is being distributed now and is detailed on all of the respective departments that I
look after, with some more information for the hon. Members opposite – to be helpful and
collegiate with them.

670 **Minister for Business, Tourism and the Port (Hon. V Daryanani):** Mr Speaker, it is an absolute
privilege to deliver my third Budget address to this House as Minister for Business, Tourism and
the Port. During the course of my contribution I will report on the work we have done over the
past financial year and set out my Ministry's objectives for this financial year.

675 Let me start with tourism and saying that my aim for tourism has not changed since I took on
this portfolio. It is to promote Gibraltar for what it is, the British jewel of the Mediterranean.
Gibraltar is the ideal tourist destination and this is the consistent message that we have delivered
at different trade fairs and the wider market.

680 In June last year we attended the European Cruise Summit in Genoa. It gave me the chance to
interact with relevant players of the cruise industry to discuss ideas and issues impacting the
industry and how to work together to shape the future of cruising in Europe. At the same time, I
met with some of the cruise lines that visit Gibraltar. It is important to maintain constant contact
with our partners so that we can keep on working together. I had the opportunity of meeting the
Minister for Tourism of Greece and the Director General of the Cruise Lines International
Association. It is always interesting meeting ministers from other countries as it allows us to
exchange ideas and see if we can work together, if at all possible. My purpose at these events is
685 to keep reminding the key decision-makers about Gibraltar and promoting this wonderful nation
of ours.

690 In July last year the Gibraltar Tourist Board exhibited at the Meetings Show in London. This show
welcomes exhibitors from around the world, including hotel destination management companies,
conference venues and technology suppliers, allowing them to come face to face with global
buyers of events, meetings and incentive locations. Lord Sebastian Coe delivered the joint keynote
with TEAMS Europe, a newly launched platform for sport-event organisers seeking destinations
and suppliers that want more sport-related conferencing and event business. I believe Gibraltar
has scope for development and growth in this field and I am working closely with the CEO of the
Gibraltar Tourist Board to explore and expand this avenue.

695 Seatrade Cruise Med took place in Malaga last September. It is the only back-to-back cruise
conference in the Mediterranean. We need to be present and visible at these exhibitions if we
want to continue promoting Gibraltar in the right way and increase cruise calls to our port. At the
conference, I took part in a panel discussion titled Promoting New Regional Cruise Itineraries. I
was joined by representatives of Malaga and Tangier, two of our main competitors in the region.
700 The presence of Gibraltar's Minister for Tourism at events like these is crucial. The discussion was
focused on increasing cruise calls in the region of the Western Mediterranean. I therefore took
the opportunity to showcase Gibraltar as a popular cruise destination, emphasising our port as
one of the best in the Mediterranean and highlighting our plans for the future. Even though
Malaga and Tangier are our competitors, it is important to explore if we can work with them to
705 see if we can attract more traffic to the region. This is something we are looking at doing.

710 Windstar Cruises *Wind Surf* cruise liner was the first to experience a tour at our City Hall. Guests
were treated to an art tour of the Mario Finalyson National Art Gallery and walked around the City
Hall learning all about its varied history and uses from it being a private residence, a hotel, the
seat of the City Council and now the office of the Mayor. The tour concluded with a canapé and
refreshments reception to sample our local cuisine in the Mayor's Parlour.

October was a busy month, once again, working with the cruising industry. Together with
MH Bland, I welcomed a group of cruise executives to Gibraltar. This familiarisation trip hosted by
MH Bland included cruise liners such as Saga Cruises, Fred Olson, Mystic Cruises, Silversea Cruises,

715 Regent Seven Seas and Azamara. These trips are very important as it allows the decision-makers
to see the destination at first hand. I am grateful to MH Bland for working in conjunction with the
Government for the good of Gibraltar. Gibraltar has all the ingredients to really become the port
of choice in the Mediterranean and we need to work in partnership to make this a success. I was
invited on board by Regent Seven Seas *Splendor* while they were here in Gibraltar. I was
interviewed by a UK film crew who were producing a piece on luxury cruising. This was an excellent
720 opportunity, once again, to showcase Gibraltar as a cruising destination. Regent have a
magnificent product and I am delighted that they are including us in their itineraries and grateful
that they promoted us through this invitation.

As part of our marketing drive, we have hosted various groups of influencers and key opinion
leaders; travel writers such as members of the British Guild of Travel writers, who visited us in
725 October, and journalists such as from the *Mail on Sunday*, City AM and a major airline loyalty
programme team. This has resulted in some excellent coverage by way of targeted travel-related
articles both online and offline.

In November, Mr Kevin Bossino, the Tourism CEO, attended a Travel Bulletin Awards dinner in
London, where Gibraltar was shortlisted in the Star Cultural Tourism Destination nominations.
730 Gibraltar was against tough competition with countries such as Greece, Israel, Italy, Jordan, South
Africa – and Thailand, who ended up winning the award. It was, nevertheless, a great achievement
to be in the same company as the countries in question. This is another example of Gibraltar
punching above its weight once again.

In December the Tourism CEO opened a *Travel Weekly* breakfast event in London, which was
735 a fabulous opportunity to address a good cross-section of the UK travel trade. These events allow
us to showcase Gibraltar as the perfect short break from the UK. They are attended by travel
agents, press and main players in the industry. We are proud of our British links and we will always
market Gibraltar in the UK.

The eighth Gibunco Gibraltar Literary Festival took place in November 2022. This three-day-
740 long event included a school programme, where a number of the international authors attended
schools around Gibraltar to speak to students about their books. This year we had diverse authors
such as Rory Cormac, Raffi Berg, Matthew Dennison, Lloyd Grossman CBE, Jonathan Fenby, Martin
Sixsmith, Prof. Mary Beard, Sir Peter Ricketts, Nicholas Janni, Alan Johnson, Maggie Gee OBE,
Patrick Gale, Charlotte Philby, Jess Phillips MP, Rt Hon. Andrew Mitchell MP, Alastair Santhouse,
745 Prof. Cath Green and lastly, but by no means least, Rachel Williams. I did not want to leave anyone
out. The authors are of exceptional quality and their talks were incredibly interesting. The event
was a success and very well received by members of the public. I would like to publicly thank the
Gibunco Group, especially Mr John A Bassadone, for their continued support to the Gibraltar
Literary Festival and I am delighted that we have already announced this year's festival, which will
750 be held between 17th and 19th November. My team and I are working hard to make sure that it
is even better than last year, so watch this space.

Gibraltar hosted the CAPA World Aviation Summit and Awards for Excellence in December last
year, which was held at the Sunborn. This two-day summit allowed me to interact with various
aviation and travel representatives from around the world with the purpose of sharing ideas
755 behind the future of the aviation industry. It was a fantastic opportunity to showcase Gibraltar
first hand to CEOs and high-level executives of the global aviation industry. Many were visiting for
the first time and were extremely impressed with what they saw, and showed interest in air links
but of course these are on hold, for obvious reasons, at this moment.

I attended the International Hotel Investment Forum in London, where I was introduced to
760 very influential hotel owners, investors and hotel companies with large property portfolios. This
led to follow-up meetings in January with professional hotel investors. It also included Meetings
Incentive Conventions and Exhibition professionals (MICE) with the intention of exploring the
potential of a MICE venue in Gibraltar. As Gibraltar grows, we need to add to our hotel room stock,
albeit this will be done in a considered and calibrated fashion.

765 All this takes time, it does not happen overnight, and I can tell you that I do not stop. We have
to continue engaging with the industry to encourage niche events. One of my goals is to make
Gibraltar a ‘happening’ place. We will continue to actively engage with destination management
companies and professional congress organisers, event planners, wedding planners, the corporate
770 sector, the education sector, culture and sports, to name a few, to be able to attract niche events
across the board. There has been good work done in the past but we can push these areas more
and continue to try to get some traction in new and established events.

Other than marketing Gibraltar in the traditional sense, there is a need to increase our digital
marketing presence and we will be engaging with relevant players in this field. There are many
areas in the digital world which can be targeted, including social media, special interest podcasts,
775 blogs, vlogs, programmatic buying, etc. Times are changing and so must we. We are also
constantly working to supplement our photographic and video stock to ensure we have the right
images and footage to entice people to travel to our wonderful and unique Rock, making sure we
showcase the variety of experiences in the destination, including history, culture, nature, wildlife,
food, wine, outdoor adventure and our special geographical location.

780 There have been a record number of 20 inaugural cruise calls in 2022, beating the previous 19
in 2016. Tourism suffered due to the pandemic and this was no exception in Gibraltar. However,
we have made a quick recovery, especially in the cruising industry, and statistics prove our hard
work. Whatever my detractors may say – and they need to realise that every time they play down
the efforts of the Government they are damaging Gibraltar’s business prospects – I will continue
785 marketing Gibraltar, because that is what our retail and hospitality industries want and expect
from me. It is not easy in this very competitive industry, but I will strain every sinew to deliver on
all fronts. At the same time, I will always continue to put Gibraltar first and leave party politics to
the Opposition.

In February I attended the CONNECT Route Development Forum in Tangier. The aim of this
790 conference is to bring together the aviation industry to discuss current matters and the future of
aviation. This gave me the opportunity to engage with airlines that currently fly to Gibraltar but
most importantly, target the Moroccan airlines. The goal is to have an air link with Morocco for
commercial and social purposes. I keep on pushing hard on this, but it can be so frustrating at
times.

795 The European Cruise Summit was held in Paris this year. Politicians, CEOs and presidents of the
most important cruise lines in the world, such as Carnival Corporation, Royal Caribbean Group,
TUI Cruises and Crystal Cruises, amongst others, joined the conference. I was introduced to one
of the principal speakers at the conference, the Spanish Secretary of State for Tourism, Ms Rosana
Morillo, who I had a brief conversation with. Once again, meeting Ministers from different
800 countries allows us to exchange views and learn.

In my view, Gibraltar should attend all important conferences, not only to keep the business
we currently hold but also to keep on building. It is clear that I am extremely ambitious for
Gibraltar’s cruising industry and believe we have to attract more calls, and this is what I am non-
stop striving to deliver. One does not know how difficult this is unless you are in there on a daily
805 basis, like I am. It is extremely easy to criticise from the Opposition benches. Their tourism
spokesman has a tendency to do so without offering any substantial solutions or new policies.
That is the style of politics that he practises. I have given the hon. Member the opportunity to
work together for the sake of Gibraltar, at least to talk; but no, Mr Speaker, he is not interested. I
wonder why. While a robust Opposition – which they are certainly not – is a fundamental
810 component of a thinking democracy, it is disheartening when criticism is driven solely by political
motives at the expense of our chances of conducting our business matters in private, away from
the prying eyes of our competitive neighbours.

Together with the CEO of Tourism and the Captain of the Port, I attended the Seatrade Global
event in Fort Lauderdale. Seatrade Global is the largest annual cruise gathering in the world. Over
815 13,000 professionals come together to innovate, uncover new trends and secure partnerships. It
gave the Gibraltar team an opportunity, once again, to reconnect with this important sector, put

forward our case for increased cruise calls and set out our ambitions within the industry. We need to do this regularly. Our competitors do it all the time and we need to make sure that we are there too. This is how the cruise industry works. It was an intense few days of marketing and networking.
820 There seems to be new competition every day. I met with 25 cruise companies at this conference, which was very fruitful as the meetings were primarily with the itinerary planners. These are people who have an important influence in the destinations that they visit and it was a good opportunity to hear from them directly. That is why Gibraltar's presence at these events is necessary, and the Government's commitment to the cruising sector is unquestionable.

825 In April we had the pleasure of welcoming *Götheborg of Sweden* to our shores. This is the world's largest ocean-going wooden sailing ship. It is a unique replica of an 18th-century Swedish East India Company merchant ship that sank outside of Gothenburg in 1745. It was a sight to behold and members of the public were able to visit the ship for a tour. I must say it sparked huge interest with visitors and locals alike and I hope to arrange something similar very soon.

830 Over the last few months the CEO has been engaging with Spanish tour operators, with the summer season upon us and an increased number of tourists expected on the Costa del Sol this year. This is an important market and we will continue with the one-to-one engagement.

I attended the Cruise Lines International Association conference in Southampton in May, where I hosted a dinner for senior cruise executives prior to the conference. This was a first and really allowed me the opportunity to engage with senior players where only Gibraltar was the subject of conversation. I look forward to hosting similar events in the near future.
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Mr Speaker, as you know, this Government truly believes in equality and inclusiveness. The Gibraltar Tourist Board has installed hearing loops – audio induction loops – at each tourist information office: John Mackintosh Square, the Frontier and the Cruise Terminal. These loops have been placed to assist people with hearing impairments. The introduction of the hearing loops is part of our commitment to ensuring an accessible and inclusive environment for all Gibraltar's visitors, so that every visitor may be able to discover first-hand the truly wonderful sites and history that Gibraltar has to offer.
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I now move to the Airport terminal. Gibraltar Airport's post-COVID recovery is well under way, and the work done by the Government during this period to consolidate our existing routes is evident as passenger figures have returned to 2019 levels. 2022 finished off with a 70% increase in passenger movements when compared to 2021, with 446,187 passengers being handled, which places the Airport back on the path to the 0.5 million mark. Increased capacity on some of the routes on our scheduled services is being achieved with aircraft configured to a higher seating capacity. The return to normality in the aviation industry has also brought with it a return to more traditional levels of traffic, both for scheduled and non-scheduled services. Movements have increased, with an overall growth of 18.3%, although there has been a slight downturn in our non-scheduled services. This is in part due to the EU/UK Air Transport Services Agreement not allowing European operators to transport passengers directly from the UK to Gibraltar and the return of better point-to-point links being provided by scheduled services post COVID. Hopefully the situation should improve once the current Brexit negotiations are concluded.
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Gibraltar, this summer, will again be served by 39 weekly flights distributed as follows: London Heathrow, 15; London Gatwick, 14; Manchester, seven; and Bristol, three. The first quarter of 2023 has also shown positive growth, with an average 24.5% increase to the same period last year. A welcome innovation this year is British Airways' addition of an extra flight to London Heathrow on Saturdays, increasing their frequency to three daily flights. This increase is being spread out over 22 Saturdays over the summer schedule and is a first for Gibraltar Airport and a welcome increase in capacity and is an excellent example of the Government working in partnership with the airlines to achieve mutual benefits. This is good for overnight tourism, this is good for retail, this is good for restaurants, this is good for our hotels and this is good for Gibraltar PLC on the whole. But what do we get from the tourism spokesman opposite? First of all, nothing positive. No surprises there, Mr Speaker. He says, and I quote, 'This doesn't compare with the high levels of activity at Malaga Airport' and that Malaga has 15 new European routes with easyJet this year.
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870 Doesn't he know that Gibraltar Airport cannot receive flights from Europe? What is he comparing?
Malaga Airport had 19.85 million passenger movements in 2019. What a ridiculous comparison. If
that is the level of his understanding of the airline industry, then God help us.

875 It is also the second year that easyJet has had a daily service to Manchester. This has become
a very popular route with our passengers and provides excellent access to the northern part of
the United Kingdom. Manchester Airport is itself becoming an important hub with 171
destinations, and this service brings with it excellent opportunities to expand connections with
Gibraltar.

Load factors during 2022 and to date in 2023 on all routes continue to be healthy and over the
80% mark, with some in the 90s.

880 Unfortunately, Gibraltar Airport has continued to be affected by flight disruptions due to issues
outside its control. The Government's position on this subject is very clear and categorical. The
Ministry of Defence must ensure that all of the services it provides for the proper functionality of
the airfield are adequately resourced and with robust business continuity plans in place for all
eventualities, so that flight operations to Gibraltar Airport can continue without interruption.

885 In November, the Air Terminal took part in the airfield crash exercise, aimed at testing and
validating the response practices and procedures in place for such an incident, organised in
conjunction with the Government's Civil Contingencies Office and RAF Gibraltar. There was also
an element of aircraft post-crash management, which dealt with the restoration of normality and
the reopening of the airfield as quickly as possible after an incident. The lessons identified after
the exercise have all been incorporated into the Gibraltar Airport Emergency Orders and
890 disseminated to all participating agencies.

Mr Speaker, moving on to the Port, 2022 has also been a challenging year. The global geo-
political situation, particularly the events unfolding in Ukraine, have had an inevitable impact in
the maritime industry internationally and also a very concrete effect in Gibraltar. These events
have come at a time when shipping was attempting to recover from the dramatic impact of the
895 COVID pandemic. We have also faced disruption to port operations due to weather conditions,
and of course we have faced the challenging situation involving the OS35. The removal of the
wreck is now complete and preparations are in place for it to be transported away from Gibraltar.
This has taken a lot of the efforts and resources of the Port to follow up and progress this removal.
But, despite all of this, the Gibraltar Port Authority has managed to perform well financially during
900 the last financial year.

We have seen something of a seesaw effect in different sectors of the Port's activity during
2022, with a drop in overall vessel and bunker calls against increased activity in ship-to-ship and
off port limit operations. This pattern has continued into 2023. However, we did see a welcome
increase in cruise calls during 2022 against the previous two years. We cannot hide from the huge
905 challenges that the cruise industry continues to face following the COVID-19 pandemic, and
Gibraltar will be affected, partly due to repositioning of vessels and changes in itineraries, where
focus has moved from the Western Mediterranean to the Eastern Med. For some people, COVID
did not happen; COVID was an excuse. They live on another planet, but in the real world we know
what the truth is. Ask those who nearly lost their jobs, ask those who nearly lost their businesses
910 and ask those who lost their loved ones: was COVID really an excuse?

But we move on, Mr Speaker. Superyacht visits have also taken a hit, especially as many of the
bigger superyachts were Russian owned or linked. But despite that, we are seeing some resilience
in general yacht calls and we anticipate that Gibraltar will see a steady level of activity during 2023
due to its reputation as a reliable port to call at for crew changes, supplies and other important
915 services. We will continue to monitor this particular activity closely and continue to liaise with our
partners in the superyacht industry as well.

Direct engagement and face-to-face marketing remains the cornerstone of the Port's
marketing strategy, and with the easing of COVID restrictions last year we were able to attend a
number of prestigious face-to-face events and hold some of our own. His Majesty's Government
920 of Gibraltar Maritime Services hosted Gibraltar Maritime Day in London in February of this year.

This was an extremely successful event with an exceptional level of interest and a model on which we plan to base future events in different jurisdictions. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all our sponsors and partners involved in these events. Without their support, both commercially and financially, it would be virtually impossible to carry out this type of marketing.

925 I am pleased to report that the third Maritime Week Gibraltar event was held at the end of June. There was huge external interest in this event. Delegates from all over the world attended, proving that Gibraltar's reputation in maritime circles is at an all-time high. I must give a special mention to our local stakeholders, once again, and partners, who worked extremely hard to make this a success.

930 We are also involved in London International Shipping Week, a bi-annual prestigious and internationally renowned event scheduled for September. HMGoG Maritime Services will be hosting a very prominent reception during this event, to be held on the rooftop of the IMO building in London, and anticipated guests include the UK Secretary of State for Shipping, the IMO Secretary General and a very high-calibre list of guests who are leaders in their industries. We look
935 forward to joining our partners in delivering this exciting event and generating interest and business opportunities for Gibraltar Port as a whole.

Mr Speaker, I now turn to the Authority's finances. As already mentioned at the beginning, the Authority has managed to perform well, considering all the obstacles faced over the last financial year. Revenue for the financial year ending 2023 was £8,255,035 against an estimated figure of
940 £7,819,000. Expenditure came in at £7,273,896 against a budget of £7,028,000. The overspill in expenditure was due to higher than anticipated insurance renewal costs for the Port and the cost of hiring out fenders throughout the year, as well as on some cleaning services. As for capital expenditure, the Authority had allocated £161,022 under Capex at the end of the financial year against a budget of £622,000. Due to tender processes and the ongoing OS35 incident, some
945 projects had not been completed within the financial year.

As reported in my last Budget speech, both the senior management team at the Port Authority and the Ministry for the Port continue to look at ways of further increasing port activity and, in turn, increasing revenue streams. A review of port tariffs is currently under way and a full consultation process will commence with stakeholders to ensure a fair and reasonable approach
950 is taken so as not to have a detrimental impact on business for the Port.

In 2022 I reported that refurbishment and repairs of the Watergardens marina would commence shortly, a project which had previously been put on hold due to the pandemic. I am pleased to confirm that this project is now under way, with detailed planning taking place between the Port Authority and the contractor appointed to deliver the project. I would have liked to have
955 started this project earlier but it simply has not been possible.

I alluded at the beginning of my statement to the negative impact which the OS35 incident had on port operations during the latter part of 2022. This significant incident has proved to be extremely challenging for my team at the Port Authority, and in particular senior management. I must take this opportunity to commend them all for the way in which this incident has been
960 handled, something which has been recognised internationally. A special mention for the Captain of the Port, John Ghio (**A Member:** Hear, hear.) – he has had numerous sleepless nights over the last 10 months, he has given his all and I consider myself extremely lucky to have him as Captain. I must also thank our local partners and stakeholders for the support shown to the Authority. The community of the Port is our biggest strength and asset, and while size does matter for some
965 things, being a small, tight-knit community continues to be a core strength for the maritime sector in Gibraltar, and, as has been shown in this instance, a significant advantage.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to thank my whole team at the Port Authority for their continuing efforts to deliver. This makes my role as Minister for the Port a lot easier. These remain challenging times but we will strive to meet and, where possible, excel.

970 Mr Speaker, I will now turn to the Gibraltar Maritime Administration (GMA). The post of Registrar of Ships was filled in March. Whilst this is very good news, the current uncertainties continue to negatively affect the size of the existing registered fleet, as some ships continue to

migrate to EU flags and the rate of new registrations has been slow in picking up. However, on a positive note, following expression of interests, we anticipate further vessels to register within the next few months. The Yacht Registry remains largely unaffected, with figures remaining stable. Also, the Small Ship Register continues to grow as per the trend in recent years. The fleet size on 1st May 2023 was 149 ships, 883 yachts and 317 small ships registered in Gibraltar. The total combined tonnage of the Gibraltar fleet on 1st May 2023 was 945,335 gross tonnes.

The Gibraltar register remained white listed within the Paris Memorandum of Understanding on port state control during 2022. The White List represents quality flags with a consistently low detention record. In addition, the Gibraltar Ship Register remained in the United States Coastguard Qualship-21 programme. The Qualship-21 programme is an initiative to identify high-quality ships and provide incentives to encourage quality operations. The Gibraltar Ship Registry is only one of a select few registers which continue to meet the requirements for full participation in the Qualship-21 programme.

The Gibraltar Ship and Yacht Registries also rated favourably within the annual International Chamber of Shipping's Flag State Performance Table 2023. The Gibraltar register once again achieved positive results. These included the performance of the administration, ratification of international conventions, completion of International Labour Organisation reports, attendance at IMO meetings as part of the UK flag, and participation in the UN IMOs Instruments Implementation Code member audit scheme.

The GMA retained its ISO 9001:2015 quality accreditation following the successful completion of a two-day recertification audit by Société Générale de Surveillance. By maintaining ISO accreditation, the GMA continues to show its stakeholders the Department's commitment to continuous process improvement, enhancing efficiency and maintaining its high standard of service delivery. The Department's continued positive performance during external audits is evidence of the hard work and commitment of the staff at the GMA. The GMA's primary goals remain to reach pre-Brexit levels in terms of fleet size and revenue and the continued operation of the register, which is based on high standards and the quality of its registered fleet.

Throughout last year, the GMA continued to receive very positive feedback in relation to the introduction of its IMO-compliant statutory electronic certificates for ships and seafarers. The transition to electronic certification has resulted in greater speed of dispatch of documents, improved traceability, enhanced security and a reduction of administrative burden on the Department and clients. Also, the introduction of the e-certificates and the cloud-based GMA/client interface portal for survey-related functions has resulted in saving in time and the reduction of the usage of paper for both the Department and clients. The introduction of the simplified fees structure last year has also been well received. Importantly, the revision of fees has also resulted in an increase in revenue.

The GMA also launched its revamped website, in keeping with the Department's commitment and strategy to provide improved and enhanced e-services to its clients. The website contains all of the standard information on the ship and yacht register, registration procedures and access to shipping guidance and information notices. Importantly, the revamped website has improved the interaction with our customers by providing some of the services we provide online 24/7, such as requesting of vessel transcripts, verification of seafarer documentation, the facility to check the availability of vessel names and the submission of documents to the GMA via a designated portal. Clients can also obtain all of the necessary forms required for ship and mortgage registration, as well as application for seafarer certification online. The improvements mentioned above have no doubt increased the register's attractiveness in what is a very competitive global market.

The GMA's Seafarers' Division continues to issue a significant number of provisional and full-term flag state endorsements. From May 2022 to May 2023 the GMA issued a total of 1,142 certificates to seafarers of many nationalities who serve on board our registered fleet.

The GMA has continued with its hard work of promoting its ship and yacht register abroad. This work included engaging in face-to-face meetings with established clients, as well as exploring new avenues to diversify its fleet by targeting potential new clients. Members of the GMA Registry

1025 team visited the Shipbuilding, Machinery and Marine Technologies Industries Exhibition in
Hamburg, Germany in September 2022. SMM Hamburg is held biennially and is regarded as the
leading international trade fair for the maritime industry, bringing together decision-makers and
industry professionals from all sectors. The fair attracts over 30,000 visitors. The visit to SMM
1030 Hamburg was combined with visits to longstanding clients based within the Hamburg area.
Working in partnership with local ship representatives, the GMA also visited ship owners in the
UK, the Netherlands and the Leer area of Germany in October 2022 and February 2023.

On 2nd February 2023, the GMA participated in the inaugural Gibraltar Maritime Day in
London. Members of the GMA gave a presentation on the Gibraltar Ship Registry and participated
1035 in a panel discussion with Gibraltar stakeholders involved in the business of ship and mortgage
registration. The presentation and discussion focused on the partnership approach to registering
ships and yachts in Gibraltar, including the many benefits its registers and Gibraltar as a
jurisdiction have to offer to owners and the wider shipping industry.

As part of its ongoing marketing campaign, the GMA will be attending a series of events and
shipping exhibitions within the upcoming months. One of these events is the biennial London
1040 International Shipping Week 2023, which is due to take place in September.

On the yachting side, the Registrar of Yachts attended the Monaco Yacht Show in September
2022. The Registrar of Yachts met with representatives of important builders and managers. The
GMA will once again attend this year's show in September. Recently, the Registrar of Yachts and
the Maritime Administrator also attended the Palma International Boat Show. They took part in a
1045 Yacht Master's event where they participated in a panel discussion on yacht management. During
their visit, the GMA also met important stakeholders and promoted the many benefits it had to
offer to masters, owners and managers.

Locally, the GMA hosted Gibraltar Maritime Week in the last week of June. This was the third
edition of this biennial event and provided a global showcase for the register. The GMA staff once
1050 again delivered the popular ship/yacht registration course, which is aimed at providing an insight
on the Gibraltar Registries, ship registration legislation and requirements, the registration process
and the unique advantages Gibraltar has to offer.

From 7th to 8th March, the Maritime Administrator and Chief Surveyor joined representatives
from across the Red Ensign Group in the REG Technical Forum, which was held in Southampton.
1055 Additionally, throughout the year the GMA also participated in the different REG technical working
group meetings. Both the Technical Forum and associated working group meetings support the
REG conference and look at how best to make sure there is consistent application of technical
policy across the British fleet, including the development of new technical standards. In
collaboration with the UK and other REG members, the GMA has continued with its monitoring
1060 programme of recognised organisations and certifying authorities. This important part of the work
the GMA undertakes ensures that statutory survey and certification functions delegated to the
accepted recognised organisations and certifying authorities are conducted in compliance with
agreed standards.

As part of its responsibilities and discharge of functions as a flag state, GMA surveyors continue
1065 to undertake audits, surveys and inspections of Gibraltar-registered ships and companies. This
work is crucial for ensuring effective jurisdiction and control over our fleet in terms of quality
standards and is also essential for keeping a close relationship and building rapport with clients.

Locally, the GMA continues to provide technical support to the Gibraltar Port Authority and
other government departments, authorities and agencies. Members of the GMA also provided
1070 technical support and continue to be part of the multi-agency team involved with the OS35
incident.

In addition, the GMA hosted two Bachelor of Science students from the Gibraltar Maritime
Academy. The interns spent three months within the different sections of the Department and
accompanied surveyors on ship visits.

1075 The GMA also continues to work closely with the Government's Law Office in ensuring Gibraltar
is in a position to implement and enforce the provisions of new international instruments or

amendments to existing instruments through appropriate Gibraltar merchant shipping legislation. This includes work relating to the Ballast Water Convention, amendments to the Safety of Life at Sea Convention and the Maritime Labour Convention, to name a few examples.

1080 The GMA continues to play a crucial role within the Gibraltar maritime cluster, both as a
facilitator of international trade and by providing significant expertise and skills to the jurisdiction.
Through its highly rated register comprised of a global trading fleet, the GMA provides Gibraltar
with a significant advantage over many other international maritime centres. Working in
1085 partnership with its stakeholders, the GMA aims to continue with its efforts to promote its high-
quality service and the many benefits its register and Gibraltar as a jurisdiction has to offer to
owners and the wider international shipping industry. I would like to thank the Maritime
Administrator, Dylan Cocklan, and his team for the hard work they have put in throughout the
year.

1090 Mr Speaker, I turn to my Royal Gibraltar Post Office responsibilities. I want to commence by
thanking the Postal Services team for their efforts. The financial year 2022-23 was turbulent for
the Royal Gibraltar Post Office due to the prolonged strikes at Royal Mail. The RGPO have made
herculean efforts to deliver a record year of excellent performance despite the difficulties and
delays due to factors out of their control. Over 100,000 parcels have been processed and delivered
1095 within the past 12 months, and the parcel post has worked with a 24-hour processing window six
days a week, Sunday to Friday. The Post Office offers uninterrupted delivery service and receipt
of parcels and letters to all 192 Universal Postal Union member countries. Furthermore, local
delivery services have continued six days per week, Monday to Saturday.

The Postal Service introduced a new and improved customer service experience by reviewing
and restructuring its resources on the customer services clerical team to meet increased customer
1100 demand and expectations. The customer services team at the Main Street Office measures our
daily performance and is constantly managing phones, emails and attending to the public. In
addition, a new customer service office was set up at the Mail Centre, managed by two staff
members. The new system evaluates the total customer experience, from customer services at
the counters to delivery services, and allows the RGPO to identify areas in need of improvement
1105 and to better adjust to customer needs.

Local businesses and residential consumers within Gibraltar rely on the RGPO as the universal
service provider for their standard local and international letter and parcel post services.
Therefore, meeting a sufficiently high standard of service for users is of significant importance.
Over 3,000 enquiries were received for postal tracking, mail redirections, parcel post collections,
1110 change of address, tracking services and, of course, the COVID certificate printing and delivery,
which has been the responsibility of the Postal Service since its inception, with over 31,000 COVID
certificates printed and delivered to Gibraltar residents.

All postal operators apply the measuring system and use external panellists to exchange test
items for the participating countries. The test items contain a radio frequency identification
1115 transponder read by RFID antennae installed at operational facilities where the postal traffic is
received and processed. This process generates the main portion of the information required to
determine the quality of service. The RGPO has radio frequency identification (RFID) scanners at
various points. The RFID tags are inside anonymous envelopes hidden in standard letter
dispatches. The RFID scanners read these tags as they pass through the entrance door at the
1120 receiving postal operator and again on exit, so they accurately measure when the letter is received
by post and is out for delivery with the postal worker. The recipient will then log into a website to
confirm receipt of the letter. Thus postal operators can have accurate information on the test
letters, perform analysis and produce reports concerning the delivery-on-time performances for
their operations.

1125 All RGPO operations continued to benefit from increased data on mail flows, which, combined
with new systems and management tools, highlight opportunities to improve service consistency
and efficiency. Process standardisation, especially in how mail is sorted, is helping integrate data

across sections, reduces variability, and provides more consistent and predictable end-to-end service performance.

1130 This year, delivery walks have increased from 13 to 17 due to new developments and housing estates. We have worked closely with the postal delivery staff and unions to account for the increase in local delivery points.

1135 I am very proud to see the red electric postal vehicles operating on deliveries around Gibraltar daily. This was one of my first projects when I started in government and is part of the Government's manifesto commitment to a green Gibraltar. The RGPO three years later continues to lead in environmental policies after investing in an entire fleet of electric cars, which at the time was thought impossible. Other organisations have followed suit, and more private companies and many government departments now also include electric vehicles as part of their fleets. The electric cars aid the Post Office in delivering an emission-free postal service to the community.
1140 Furthermore, our postal workers complete many delivery walks within the Town area on foot, showing a willingness to contribute to our environmental mission. Working hand in hand with local companies to promote programmes such as recycling mail, cardboard and plastics adds to our mission of becoming an entirely environmentally friendly and carbon-neutral logistics operation.

1145 I was very proud to lead the Royal Gibraltar Post Office's new parcel post system, EPOST, launched in 2021, which continues to grow in popularity. As a result, 10,529 Gibraltar residents have registered on our parcel post system and receive, free of charge, all postal notifications electronically, thus saving in costs, reducing the number of printed notification cards and helping our green policy by reducing our collection notice deliveries to the recipient. Additionally, all
1150 registered customers are informed electronically when their parcels have arrived and are ready for collection, making the receiving and delivery process quicker and easier. Payment of customs charges and duties can be made online, which helps reduce waiting times.

Gibraltar's iconic red post boxes, which are part of Gibraltar's heritage and tourism product, provide an easy and convenient way for our customers to post letters. The RGPO has embarked
1155 on a restoration and maintenance programme for the last five years, ensuring every pillar box is repainted and restored at least every two years. In addition, we have added five more pillar boxes, strategically placed around Gibraltar to cater for the increased population in areas such as Eastern Beach and the South District. All Gibraltar pillar boxes are collected daily at 7 a.m. and the mail collected is sorted and delivered within the same day, except on Sundays. The new cypher for King
1160 Charles III has been unveiled. Inspiration has been drawn from past ciphers, but there are practical considerations about how cyphers appear on letter boxes. The Royal Gibraltar Post Office awaits a cast-iron post box and a more modern pillar box with the new King's cipher. The final design will include the crown above the cipher with the Roman numerals for three. At present, there are only four decorated post boxes to celebrate the coronation across the UK. Gibraltar will have its own
1165 official King Charles post box before the end of 2023. Gibraltar boasts the only known street that has an example of a letter box from each British monarch since they were first introduced in 1852 during the reign of Queen Victoria, so undoubtedly the cast-iron King Charles III post box will be located in the Town area, so that our locals and tourists can enjoy a walk down Gibraltar's Main Street and see these iconic letter boxes.

1170 A clear direction continues to be established to continue with improvements, which has already led to noticeable performance improvements and financial savings. As a result, the RGPO saved £69,381 in its expenditure budget for 2022-23. Further savings are expected during the financial year 2023-24, thanks to operational efficiencies and cost-reduction exercises, whilst improving performance.

1175 We continue to see a substantial volume of incoming parcels due to the continuous growth of e-commerce purchases. The RGPO takes very seriously its responsibilities in ensuring parcel values and contents are correctly declared and works closely with HM Customs and enforcement agencies. Another critical aspect for the RGPO is dangerous and prohibited items in the mail. The Civil Aviation Authority conducted an extensive audit in 2023 on postal operations in Gibraltar,

1180 handling parcels and letters from a security perspective. These items are then transported by air on commercial flights. I am pleased that the Post Office succeeded in this audit and met all the Civil Aviation Authority set-out criteria.

1185 As the Minister with responsibility for postal services, I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of the postal workers at the Mail Centre and the Main Street office for the work done seven days a week and for ensuring that Gibraltar is connected to the rest of the world, literally speaking. At the same time, I would like to thank Glendon Martinez, the Director of Postal Services, for his sterling work throughout the year.

1190 Finally, in March this year, two long-time employees of the RGPO, Mr Paul Acolina and Mr Stephen Borrell, retired after 35 years at the Post Office. I congratulate them both on their retirement and thank them for the incredible years of work they have given. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank Sabina Pitaluga, who will retire next month. Sabina has done an amazing job behind the scenes, quietly getting on with the daily running of the RGPO. She will be missed.

1195 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Lots of Bossino's doing well in government. All the good ones.

Hon. V Daryanani: And they all work for me!

1200 **Hon. Chief Minister:** [*inaudible*].

Hon. V Daryanani: I move on to business, Mr Speaker.

1205 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Because that is where you are staying. (*Laughter*)

Hon. V Daryanani: As reported in the past, my Ministry is a strategic partner of the Commonwealth Enterprise and Investment Council (CWEIC). The Gibraltar office was opened two years ago to assist strategic partners to establish, develop and sustain a network of productive relationships across the Commonwealth's global business ecosystem in order to enable sustainable growth.

1210 In June last year I attended the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in Kigali. The meeting brought together delegations from 54 countries within the Commonwealth family. It allowed me to discuss possible business opportunities with investors and showcase Gibraltar as a successful business jurisdiction. Events like this allow us to network with business and political leaders and promote the Gibraltar brand in every sector. I was also invited to participate in a panel discussion on sustainable tourism and was given the opportunity to meet and briefly speak to His Royal Highness the then Prince of Wales and now King Charles III. It was an absolute honour, as I would never have thought that we would go through the sad loss of Her Majesty the Queen a few months later. Overall, this was an extraordinary opportunity to showcase Gibraltar politically, economically and as a successful nation within the wider Commonwealth family.

1220 My attendance at the Commonwealth Trade and Investment Summit in London last December allowed me to continue discussions with persons I had previously met and also gave me the opportunity to make new contacts. These varied from heads of government and ministers, including the former UK Prime Minister David Cameron, and senior business leaders. This two-day event was organised by the Commonwealth Enterprise and Investment Council and consisted of meetings and networking. I also took part in a presentation at Gibraltar House to showcase investment opportunities in Gibraltar, where 40 guests attended from Nigeria, Ghana, Cameroon, Gabon, Serbia and Australia. I was also invited to take part in a roundtable discussion titled The Future of the Global Workplace. All this raises Gibraltar's profile within the Commonwealth family.

1230 I look forward to further collaborating with CWEIC, as the Commonwealth is important to Gibraltar as we move into a post-Brexit world.

1235 Locally, I continue to meet regularly with the Chamber of Commerce and the Gibraltar
Federation of Small Business. It has been a difficult few years. The recovery from COVID has
thankfully been swift. The Government's actions during the pandemic cannot be forgotten. By
doing what we did, we saved businesses and we saved jobs. This has allowed the swift recovery I
am referring to. My door is always open to them and I look forward to working closely with them
and dealing with the concerns they might have. One of the concerns has been obtaining bank
finance for start-ups. To that end, I will be launching a new scheme. It will be known as the
1240 Gibraltar Enterprise Scheme. This is being finalised and I hope to make a detailed announcement
in the next few months.

Mr Speaker, it has been another challenging year. It is not easy in government – far from it,
even lonely at times. My colleagues and I have done everything possible to make sure that we
deliver the best for our people. Have we made some mistakes? Of course we have. Would we
have liked to have done more? Of course we would. But we need to put things into perspective.
1245 These last four years have probably been the most problematic in the history of Gibraltar. I cannot
end without thanking my hon. Friends the Chief Minister and the Deputy Chief Minister. They have
done a mammoth job over the last few years dealing with the EU treaty. They have given it their
all and more. They have left no stone unturned, worked non-stop around the clock – weekends,
no family time. Gibraltar is extremely fortunate to have them at the helm at this important
1250 juncture in our history. I have no doubt whatsoever that they will give it their all once again to
make sure that they finish the job in a safe and secure manner for our people.

I would like to thank my team at the Ministry. I would struggle to do this job without them.
They have got to know me very well and know that I can be extremely demanding, picky
sometimes, but they also know that I have a lot of time for them – (*Interjection*) me, too – and
1255 truly care for them.

Mr Speaker, thank you and the Parliament team for the excellent job that you all do.

Finally, this year is election year and no doubt the Opposition will throw the kitchen sink at us,
the whole shebang. The absence of substantive solutions and new policies from them is a missed
opportunity for robust debate. It is not only about identifying flaws in government policies but
1260 also about offering concrete alternatives that can be thoroughly evaluated and debated. It cannot
always be criticise, criticise, criticise, (*Interjection*) but that is what they are about. When they say
something, they contradict what they said earlier. (*Interjection*) Even they do not believe what
they say anymore, Mr Speaker. Furthermore, without viable alternatives, the Opposition's
criticism comes across as nothing more than political posturing and grandstanding. It is a means
1265 to scoring cheap points and gaining short-term political advantage, rather than a genuine effort
to improve the lives of citizens and address the pressing issues Gibraltar is facing. We need more
than empty rhetoric, because that is all they bring to the table. Divisive politics and lack of vision
is what this Opposition is about. Our Government is committed to upholding the values of
transparency, progress and unity. (*Interjection*) We believe in the potential of our nation and will
1270 continue working tirelessly to ensure a brighter future for all our people.

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

Adjournment

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Mr Speaker, here I was thinking I was the only 'pikki' in this
place, but there is another one.

1275 Mr Speaker, I move that the House should now adjourn until tomorrow at 11 o'clock in the
morning, when we will have the benefit of the analysis of the economy and the public finances of
Sir Joe Bossano, (**A Member:** Hear, hear.) which I am sure all Members on all sides of the House
and all members of this community will be looking forward to.

Mr Speaker: I now propose a question, which is that this House do now adjourn to Thursday, 13th July at 11 a.m.

1280 I now put the question, which is that this House do now adjourn to Thursday, 13th July at 11 a.m. Those in favour? (**Members:** Aye.) Those against? Passed.

This House will now adjourn to Thursday, 13th July at 11 a.m.

The House adjourned at 4.10 p.m.