



PROCEEDINGS OF THE GIBRALTAR PARLIAMENT

AFTERNOON SESSION: 4.05 p.m. – 8.36 p.m.

Gibraltar, Friday, 4th July 2025

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The Gibraltar Parliament

The Parliament met at 4.05 p.m.

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

[CLERK TO THE PARLIAMENT: P A Borge McCarthy Esq *in attendance*]

Appropriation Bill 2025 — Second Reading — Debate continued

Madam Speaker: Yes, the Hon. Pat Orfila.

Hon P A Orfila: Thank you Madam Speaker.

5 Madam Speaker, as you are well aware, I have two portfolios, Housing and the University.

This year I have chosen to start with the University. Madam Speaker, it is a great pleasure to be here once again delivering my second budget speech and indeed I am and will forever be grateful to everyone who put me in this position so that I could deliver policies and make a difference to the people of this community.

10 Madam Speaker, as Minister for the University of Gibraltar, I am pleased to relay that the University is doing us proud. Nothing gives me greater pleasure in life than to see students being successful in their academic world. It can be the ticket that will open doors to many areas of their working lives. Academic qualifications is becoming an important factor in the lives of young adults and I am so glad that now we can serve those who, for whatever reason, did not want to go abroad to study.

15 This University offers locals a chance to graduate in their own homeland and we have already seen these results during the graduation ceremony. The pride on the faces of those students as they climb the stairs and receive their certificates will forever be a testament of what this GSLP Liberal Government made possible.

20 This year will mark the University's 10th Anniversary. Despite its relatively young age, it continues to establish itself internationally, regionally and locally as an institution of teaching and learning and research excellence, providing a diverse range of academic programmes. Professional and continuing education courses, language courses and technical training courses.

25 The programmes offered in Marine Science, Computer and Entrepreneurship, Nursing and Business are all supported by a range of access courses and postgraduate degrees offered in management and leadership, research and education, business Gaming, Marine Science, Environmental Science and Healthcare.

30 New courses offered this year are a BSc honours in mental health nursing and an MSc in advanced Health Practise. These courses will be able to provide staff with the knowledge and crucial healthcare specialities. An Access to higher education and business was also offered to the general public. This has proved to be so successful that we shall be offering it again in January 2026.

Madam Speaker, the University continues to grow. Last year there were 280 students. This year we have seen a 17% growth from the previous year, making it a total of 326 students enrolled

35 in the current academic year 2024/2025. Our University has graduated nearly 350 students to date. This December 2025 we expect a bumpy year of 120 students who will graduate and we are expecting over 500 people to attend the graduation ceremony and they will come from all over the world because we have students from all over the world, not just Gibraltar. Our University has graduated nearly 350 already.

40 We are also happy to inform that our undergraduate students are usually employed within a space of six months, significantly higher than those in the UK. It is also pleasing to note that local students now share the campus in approximately equal numbers with a diverse international body of students which represent 50 different nationalities from across the globe.

Next year we shall see a further two degrees offered at the University, a BSc honours in applied
45 Marine Science and a BSc honours in Psychology and Counselling. The first is designed for highly skilled graduates capable of addressing the complex ecological challenges of the 21st century. There is hands-on experience alongside practical learning and laboratory work as well as theoretical studies of course.

The second is aligned with the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy. This
50 degree equips students for professional registration and further study and prepares them for a career in the fields of Counselling, Psychotherapy and Psychology.

During the course of this academic year the University was able to attract funding from Kusuma Trust to whom we are very grateful and were able to establish a state-of-the-art simulator for the training health practitioners, complete with a six-bed ward, a high dependency unit and
55 rehabilitation unit together with classrooms. This was officially opened in May of this year.

Madam Speaker, our University has strong commitment to research and has established itself as the Centre of Excellence in Responsible Gaming (CERG), as well as research hubs in environment, natural sciences, business and management, history and culture, education and health. We collaborate on research projects with top universities like Cambridge and Yale and 85%
60 of its publications have been published in high-impact journals, all very significant for such a young University.

This is very tangible benefits for Gibraltar's future. Once again the University hosted the now annual Research That Benefits Gibraltar conference which is organised by the University to showcase the research that is being undertaken by current PhD students. These are varied and
65 most if not are all linked to this University's commitment to promote positive change, whether it is promoting our natural ecosystems, enhancing public health or strengthening business and policy decisions.

The School of Marine and Environment Science launched the coral restoration project last year and has already restored 70 coral colonies. This in turn preserves the ecological role which is so
70 important for the survival of our reefs. It also supports the diving tourism industry and fosters a sense of stewardship from marine conservation.

The University has also hosted the International Conference on Behavioural Addictions (ICBA). This was a three-day event opened by the Chief Minister attracting 400 international researchers to Gibraltar and the Mediterranean Studies Conference was also another three-day conference
75 which I had the pleasure of opening recently. This attracted 150 international researchers to Gibraltar from all over the world. Next year this group will be hosted by the Aegean University in Greece.

Madam Speaker, this year we have also seen an increase in professional courses and technical training. 400 local students, last year we had 136 so we have grown, have undertaken professional
80 or short courses at the University providing the local community with an increased number of skilled individuals.

There are a range of professional development courses and CPD accredited short courses all aimed at addressing local needs and covering topics that include Gibraltar law, Gibraltar tax, accounting, finance and management. During 2024/2025 it expanded its provision to include the
85 delivery of seven short courses to HM Government of Gibraltar and launched the first in a series

of in-person accredited IT courses, two which were delivered this year with a further two planned for next year.

The University has also had a busy year providing English classes to 184 local students in various businesses in Gibraltar. We have also provided classes for the language of Spanish and provided intensive English courses for groups of Japanese, Polish students which support a growing number of international students.

Madam Speaker, in terms of technical training, the University's Maritime Academy's reputation continues to grow with an increased number of beyond compliance operational Firefighting Courses. These are delivered for local and international shipping operators including Carnival UK, P&O, Cunard, Morella and Virgin Voyages, all adding remarkable value to the cruise ships that call at Gibraltar.

Together with the Gibraltar Defence Police we have also assisted with our ongoing maritime firearms training package. This has been possible because of the University's state of the arts maritime fire simulator which the University opened last year.

A search and training course has also been developed and delivered for the Gibraltar Port Authority. Officers, they come and it adds unspoken value to Gibraltar as a maritime centre of excellence.

Madam Speaker, the School of Maritime is developing into a major competitive edge in the form of guaranteed sea placements for students completing the BSc in Marine Science Cadetship. This year has seen an additional sea time agreements with Balearia, Mbari Ship Management, Virgin Voyages, Boluda and DFDS.

Madam Speaker, despite the constraints posed by processing delays with visas for international students, recruitment of students nonetheless, the University continues to be successful. With the income from tuition fees increasing from £2,475,682 year-ending 2024 to an estimated increase of £2.8 million by July 2025. This is a clear indication, Madam Speaker, that the University's quality is an institution of excellence and it is being recognised both far and wide. And recruitment growth is very healthy. Key locations for all programmes include Spain, Morocco, UK, USA, British Overseas Territories, Canada and Europe.

Under the GSLP Liberal Government Manifesto 2023, it was stated that the recognition of the benefits to the Gibraltar economy of increasing the number of international students, Government would assist the University in its efforts to attract a wider network of international students to increase the current £5.7 million a year. It is therefore pleasing to note that the contribution to the Gibraltarian economy from international students alone for the year-ending 2024 was £8.3 million and that for this current academic year, this figure will reach £9.5 million net - I am sure my friend Minister Feetham will be very happy.

To conclude, Madam Speaker, the University of Gibraltar continues to achieve remarkable results in all areas. Its academic offerings, research initiatives and technical training programmes and financial performance are in very good health and impressively effective. From here, I extend my thanks to all stakeholders for their unwavering support and commitment to our University. But a special mention must go to Vice-Chancellor Catherine Bachleda for her enthusiasm, her drive and the ability to make things happen. She is fully committed to the University and with her amazing team of professionals, there is no stopping her. Every ship needs a confident and intelligent captain at the helm. The University, Madam Speaker, is therefore on a long journey to success and prosperity.

I now turn because you see, Madam Speaker, I think they have left the best till the very last. Housing. Something which is very close to my heart and I am sure the hearts of many of the people who are watching us today.

I have often been asked by many how I survive such a challenging Ministry in such a small community. I often say that having worked in Bayside for so many years trained me for this role. But seriously, Madam Speaker, the answer is simple - because I do my best to help as many people as I can and I think the people know this.

Since I last stood here, I have finished the New Housing Act and the New Housing Allocation Scheme. Both are ready to fly and shall be set free in the very near future. I would like to extend my immense gratitude to everyone who worked tirelessly to deliver this. Attorney General Michael LLamas, Michael Podesta, Paul Peralta, Michelle Walsh, Ray Piley, John Baw and anyone else I may have forgotten. Your contribution has been exceptional and thank you for a job well done.

I am also happy to confirm that this year saw the inclusion of a Mental Welfare Officer which had been an extremely invaluable and beneficial addition to our Housing Allocation Committee. In today's world it's an absolute must and a bonus to have such experts in this field on board the Housing Allocation.

Their contribution was not only welcomed but it is also a necessary input in today's fast changing and challenging world where mental awareness is so important. We must support the mental health and support the health and wellbeing of the individuals in our community so the representation of this body in the Housing Allocation Committee team was very much needed. I must extend my thanks to all the Members of a very accomplished Housing Allocation Committee team who do exceptionally difficult work giving up their free time and are always ready to help and discuss the complex cases which they are presented with. The work they do for this community cannot be taken for granted.

We now reflect on the Rent and Repair Scheme which was met with eye rolling and gesticulations of disbelief in an inconceivable idea by the hon. Members of the Opposition. However once again it has now become common practise that they were proved wrong, and the scheme was a huge success. Let me tell you Madam Speaker that we were able to give 17 flats which had been left to crumble and late forgotten to 17 families. From this exercise we're in the process of retrieving seven Government flats back into the Housing stock and we removed nine applicants from the general waiting list and one from the medical A list. We are assured that the flats are being brought back to life and that the standards to which they are being refurbished has already enhanced the area which is exactly what our aim was. We are so proud of this venture that we are hoping to showcase the excellent refurbishments carried out and the before and after of some of these houses and how they have been transformed - believe it.

I reiterate 17 houses were given in one go, never had this happened before and there were many who were unconvinced that this would ever take off. Not only did it happen but it was a resounding success and now we are constantly being asked when phase two will be announced.

Presently we are already looking forward to announcing the next rent and repair phase two and my team can't wait to get started on this after the enormous success of phase one. No eye rolling this time I see from my Shadow.

Like a true Socialist Government seven years rent free was given to those who offered to renovate the entire property. We are already seeing the positive consequences of that scheme. From here I would like to extend my congratulations to all those who are successful in their applications and wish them a long happy and prosperous life in their new homes and I must extend my heartfelt thanks to the team who worked day and night in order to ensure that this exercise was a huge success. The combination of the Housing Department and the Housing and Works Agency working together both day and night achieved this overwhelming result and from here I extend my gratitude to each and every one of them. To the Housing Manager and her team and to the Housing and Works Agency and his team I extend my personal thanks. They have been instrumental in the success of this venture.

I must also point at this point Madam Speaker. I must express how proud I am to say that this team were hailed winners of the project achievement award for their magnificent team effort in this historic and innovative project. Their combined efforts are a testimony of what can be achieved when we all work together towards the same goal. We shall continue to offer rent and repair to those in the waiting list or exchange list taking everything into consideration and in consultation with the Housing Allocations Committee and we shall continue to offer a period of

seven years rent free in order to compensate for the expense that will be incurred on that refurbishment.

190 This Department is in contact with those who were afforded the rent and repair scheme and we are more than impressed with what has been and is being achieved. These abandoned and forgotten houses are being turned into family homes where the laughter of children will once again echo on their walls.

Madam Speaker, it is my opinion that this has been one of the most impressive achievements that Housing has offered the community in a long time. This exercise had never been tested before but there was never any doubt in my mind that it would be a huge success. So bring on phase two.

Madam Speaker, I now turn to the allocation of flats. Since taking office in October 2023, keep laughing, we have allocated 284 flats. This does not diminish the fact that there are more applicants putting their names on the waiting list than what we are releasing. I do not believe that the amount of Housing applications is a true reflection of those who actually want a Government house but more of an application handed in simply for the fact that they want the names to be on the list so when affordable housing comes out they are there on the waiting list.

The reality, Madam Speaker, is that we have at least 400 young adults turning 18 every year and the great majority will be putting their names down on the Housing waiting list, especially for that sole purpose. In the last 12 months, Madam Speaker, we have allocated 184 flats to applicants on the waiting list. We have received a total of 522 new application forms, 293 of which have expressed an interest in purchasing in Affordable Housing Schemes, so we can see that the 500 odd is not the true reflection of those wanting Government Rental.

We are in the process of producing a new application form for those who solely want to buy and are not interested in Government rental flats. I believe this will give us a clearer indication of who really wants Government rental accommodation and who does not. Jot it down, but make sure, but make sure that this time you get it right. Make sure that you get it right.

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): It's a policy you've never announced. A policy you were thinking about. A policy you thought you might one day announce.

Hon. P A Orfila: It's called wishful policies.

That's what it is. Aside from affording houses to those on the waiting list, my design, since I took over the reins of Housing Department, has always been to save as much money for the taxpayer as possible and to make the money we have stretch as far as possible, so we do not waste money, you see. In order to do this and have a faster turnover of flats, we introduced the "As-Is" category, where applicants and tenants are quite happy to accept the flat and do the repairs themselves to their own taste.

The Department overlooks where necessary to ensure that everything is done according to Government standards. This helps those who are in desperate need for a house and who do not want to wait. They can accept the keys and move in immediately instead of waiting for what can sometimes be a very lengthy refurbishment period.

And not just that, that maybe we put white tiles in and they come in, knock them all down and put the pink ones in. So leaving it up to them even saves us money, especially we do not waste.

Refurbishments can cost this Government huge amounts of money or will depend on the way that the flat is handed back to us. Sometimes, Madam Speaker, it is difficult to even walk in through the door because the place has been left in such a shambolic state. We are also working on a penalty which shall be issued to tenants who leave their homes in such an appalling mess.

Refurbishments can be a costly and lengthy process, and the way that some tenants leave their flats is completely unacceptable. The "As-Is" scheme means that this year, because we have given out 36 properties at a refurbishment cost, give or take £15,000 per flat, we have saved the taxpayer £540,000. It is more than half a million. If we add the 17 rent and repair to this amount, it comes to another save of a quarter of a million, £255,000.

When we add these two figures together, we will see that this Department has saved the taxpayer approximately three quarters of a million pounds, £795,000. So well done, Housing.

The tenants are happy because they need not wait for the flats, and we are happy because we have saved you, the taxpayer, an enormous amount of money. This initiative has been a win-win for everyone and has been very much welcomed.

Another very successful introduction, Madam Speaker, has been the hotline. Last year we received 32 calls, and we were able to retrieve 10 flats. This year, in the last 12 months, we have received 105 calls through the hotline, but only 40 gave precise numbers and addresses. From the 40 legitimate calls, 12 flats have been recovered via legal proceedings, and we have begun the same process with another 7 properties. A total of 19 flats have been recognised as unused.

Madam Speaker, the hotline has proved to be a vital lifeline and an important vein in the Housing Department. It ensures that our very much needed rental stock is being used to its full capacity, and from here I want to extend my thanks to all those who call through the hotline, and I would like to encourage the people to continue to do so, to keep their eyes peeled and to inform us of any houses which they suspect are lying empty.

There are so many people who would welcome that empty flat. It is usually unfair and extremely selfish to have a house locked up when someone else could be making it their home.

Before I go on, I would like to say at this point that I did an exercise to see how much rental stock we had and how much rental stock had been sacrificed. The GSD Government sold 200 of our rental stock - 200. And now people who call in through the hotline telling us that a house is closed, that the windows are closed, that there's no one around, and we check, that house has been sold. So that for me was a crime in itself, giving away our rental stock which is so precious to people who are waiting on that waiting list.

Hon. Chief Minister: That was GSD policy.

Hon. P A Orfila: Of course, let us not forget, they are quiet now.

Let me take this opportunity to remind everyone that our hotline number is 200 40040. Feel assured that these calls are completely anonymous and untraceable and that this Department acts upon all your calls. Remember that it is thanks to your calls alerting us to the misuse of Government flats that 19 families have been allocated those houses. Please keep us informed as you are doing this community a very worthwhile service.

Madam Speaker, one very significant role of the Housing Department is listening to its tenants. Our new counters have proved to be extremely valuable and now our tenants can be seen in the privacy of a soundproof cubicle. This has been received with much praise from people who have come to us to our counters. They have welcomed the personal and confidentiality that our cubicles now offers them.

We also have the Housing and Works reporting office there which attend those who come in with works issues, defects or other complaints. Counter cubicles are open every day from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. and Housing and Works counter is open every day from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m.. Moving forward, I am introducing a tally system to more accurately record foot traffic at our counters in order to identify how many tenants come to our counters. For example, in the first two weeks of June, we saw 186 individuals.

This figure, however, does not include counter queries. These are individuals who come in to complete applications which have been sent back, social book signing, signing of allocation contracts, inclusion, exclusions, name changes and so on and so forth.

Madam Speaker, aside from counter interactions, I have also seen 104 people in my Ministerial Clinics. I am also very conscious that there is still a long queue in the list of people who still want to see their Minister and we are trying to fit them in as soon as possible. However, there is also the opportunity of seeing our Principal Housing Officer or the Housing Manager, both who can offer excellent advice and guidance and they can usually be accessed quickly for a quicker, faster result.

People are grateful for these meetings, and we do try our best to solve issues and, in the event, where we cannot provide an immediate solution, we can at least offer advice or direction.

The Housing Manager has seen a total of 27 clinics since June 2024. This Department has also held 83 social interviews. 492 cases have gone through the Housing Allocation Committee, out of which there were 314 Medical Cases.

Madam Speaker, I also continue to meet with the tenants from our Housing estates and whenever possible we address any issues which they may have as soon as possible. These meetings are very fruitful, and they are attended not just by our tenants but by the environmental Agency, the Environmental Department, the Royal Gibraltar Police, Car Parks, Britannia, OSG and in some cases Technical Services. This is essential as it ensures that the tenants' issues are addressed there and then because they can talk to the professionals who are there at the meeting and discuss the concerns first hand.

From here, I would like to extend my sincere thanks to all of those Departments for giving up some of the very valuable time to attend our Tenants' Association meetings. Their contribution is certainly appreciated and recognised.

An important suggestion that arose during one such meeting was that of Temporary Parking Permits. These permits were only being issued in Mid Harbours yet there were also vulnerable people in other estates who also qualified for such a permit. The purpose for such a scheme is that only those who depend on home care will be given one permit per household, always at the discretion of the Principal Housing Officer and this will enable home carers to park within the tenant's parking space for a minimum of four hours. The tenant will of course have to pay for the use of his parking space.

This exercise will now include and apply to Mid Harbours, Varyl Begg, Chilton Court and Edinburgh Estate as they all have allocated parking bays. It saves you know many of the older people who live on their own and sometimes want their daughter to come in and get them food or bring them something and they don't know where to park, well if they have a designated parking bay which they are paying for then they have a parking permit that allows them to park there for four hours. So that I think will improve the quality of life in the estates for our older tenants or for those who need someone to pop in and see how they are doing.

The upkeep of our estates and the well-being of our tenants is an important factor here and I must extend a heartfelt thank you to those men and women who so generously give up their free time to steer this ship and to ensure that their estates are blossoming and try to keep everything ship shape for us. The list is very long but you know who you are, and your input is really valuable so sincerely it is very much appreciated. A huge thank you to all of you for the hard work you do.

Madam Speaker, I must mention a policy that this Department which I think it's been met with applause from both young and old and that is providing and fitting the providing and fitting of boilers to old age pensioners who live on their own in Government accommodation. This is commonly done in the pensioners blocks but I feel that those who live on their own in Government rental flats have as much right so if you're an old age pensioner and you live on your own the Government will give you the boiler and will fit it for you.

Madam Speaker, I must also say how excited I am about the introduction of CCTV cameras in some of the hot spots in certain estates. This is a definite step in the right direction towards an attempt to curb the anti-social behaviour that takes place in some of our estates. This Government has send for CCTV cameras to be placed in Glacis Estate, Laguna Estate, Mid Harbours, Varyl Begg, Moorish Castle. We're also looking into extending the tender to other estates in the future.

As an educator by profession, I feel very strongly about the lack of respect that seems to be germinating in many pockets of our society. This is something that my Shadow the Hon. Mr. Bossino agrees with me - this is something we agree on.

Fortunately we cannot put everyone in the same bracket but nonetheless still unacceptable and from here I want to keep encouraging everyone that anti-social behaviour needs to be reported so it can be challenged by those in authority. Remember that Housing can relocate people who are a constant nuisance and we have done so already but we need your support and

this is up to the Madam Speaker to report anti-social behaviour so that we can build a case against people and then make them move or relocate them. We continue to work closely with the RGP and the Security Services.

In this year since June 2024, we have received 141 emails of anti-social practise which we have dealt with accordingly. This marks 51 complaints more than last year and this shows that this disrespectful behaviour is not being tolerated anymore by our tenants, and I encourage them to continue to report anti-social behaviour to the RGP. With the reporting to the RGP and the support from our tenants this Department will be able to better deal with those culprits.

We will not shy away from taking steps to relocate them once we have logged in enough evidence to do so. I certainly Madam Speaker shy away from nothing I can assure you.

Madam Speaker last year we also introduced the Care of Address which has helped 55 people who would have otherwise lost their rightful renewal for important documentation. Our online applications forms have benefited many who have been able to fill in forms and return them via the Housing E-Gov Portal avoiding having to come in physically. The Housing Department is now finally well stepped into the digital world. The six new online forms which we introduced last year have been a blessing to many who are making applications much easier to manage from the comfort of their own homes. Of course we are always here and avail ourselves to help any who are not computer savvy.

Madam Speaker another accomplishment has been the introduction of direct debit. This has now overtaken standing orders as a more efficient and practical payment method.

As from July last year to date we have 1,202 tenants on direct debit and we are happy to share that that 946 more payments have been made. As from April 2024 to March 2025 we have collected a total of £5,451,140 and we have collected £298,814 more than last year. I can also share that since June 2024 to June 2025 we have recovered £186,128.60 in arrears.

From here I want to thank those who never fail with their monthly payments and who are an asset to the Housing rental in our community. Let me also say that thankfully you are in the majority. Our tenants are trustworthy honest and religiously mindful of not falling into debt and from here my message to you all is stay assured that we are trying our best to recover arrears and we shall use whatever strategy is necessary to achieve this.

For example, we are presently looking at subletting the parking spaces of tenants who have arrears and have not entered into a package of payment. I think that is a good idea. Until they enter into a package of payment and start payment, they will not have their parking back.

In this way tenants who are in arrears will not increase the amount they owe by way of subletting. We can generate an income where there was none so that is a win-win for Government. These parking's will be offered to tenants who live within the relevant estate and it shall be offered according to the merits of each case and approved by the Principal Housing Officer.

Madam Speaker I now turn to the excellent work which is carried out by our Housing Works Agency team. Since June 2024 up to and including May 31st 2025 the Agency have completed 103 flat refurbishments, 123 Occupational Therapy Works, 2,509 after-hour emergencies, 1,596 emergencies during working hours and 5,758 maintenance and repair works. This Madam Speaker adds up to 10,089 work duties carried out by the Housing Works Agency.

There were also 1,164 jobs that were tackled in-house by the Housing Works Agency personnel. Also note that we generated an excess of 16,000 reports which includes the above plus jobs tackled by the GEA Gibraltar Electrical Authority and the Environmental Agency. The latter however does not have a direct financial impact on Housing or Housing Works Agency.

In some occasions Madam Speaker we have had to call on the help of external agencies when it is required so a huge thank you to them for their prompt response always. Working as a team always makes things much easier and quicker to resolve.

I must mention that the refurbishment of our estates are ongoing and proving to be the talk of the town. The vibrant colours of Varyl Begg Estate is a winner with everyone and the completion of workmanship is clearly visible in all the estates which are being refurbished. McMillan House

395 and Tankerville House are progressing steadily with a completion programme for the end of the next financial year. Likewise, Knights Court and St John's Court are advancing satisfactorily, and work should also be finalised before the end of the next Financial Year.

Praise must be given where praise is due and I must therefore commend the meticulous attention to detail. Well done to everyone involved. A job well done.

400 Madam Speaker I must at this point thank my Housing Department team and the Housing Works team. They are working together in a way that they are a credit to the Department of Housing. No one is aware of the hard work and the long hours that they put in to ensure that this community is running smoothly.

405 Most of us can do with going on holiday and forgetting about work, not Housing. This team is on shift at every hour of every day regardless. Working for the Housing Department Madam Speaker is a tough job and sometimes the abuse that is hurled at the staff is most unfair and certainly uncalled for.

410 But they keep their cool and they get on with their job and from here I commend them for their daily patience and hard work. Of course I must also thank my Ministerial team. They are always there for me and without them I don't think I'd function in the morning. If my coffee wasn't ready, I didn't think I'd be able to get on with what the day gives me because believe you me Housing is hard. Housing is very challenging, but we love it.

415 All the people that work for me both in the Agency both in the Department in my ministry are truly an asset and without their input things would not march as smoothly. So a huge personal thank you from me to all of you.

420 Madam Speaker and I come to the hostels which is also in this budget speech and I'm sure that the hon. Gentlemen across the road I was going to say that's how far I think they are, are very keen to hear about this. Right the designs for the new Sunrise Hostel have already been submitted and planning permission has already been given to go ahead of this project which will soon offer a brand-new workers' hostel.

425 Work on this will be starting shortly. Presently we have spent £60,000 in refurbishing the Queen's Hostel to make it as pleasant as possible for those who are there until they are moved to the brand or relocated to their brand-new lodgings at the Sunrise Hotel Hostel. We shall ensure that the new hostel will offer great accommodation with excellent facilities including a prayer room for those of the Muslim faith.

Many have not paid their rent in years. The hostels may need refurbishment but those who have rooms refuse to contribute a single penny for the use of the facility. However, we are slowly addressing this issue.

430 From June 2024 to date we have recovered £61,689 from the Sunrise Hostel and £27,845 from the Queen's. So we are heading in the right direction. We are grateful for the work which is being done both in the refurbishment of the hostels and on the recovery of monies to JT Security. They are doing a wonderful job and from here we say a huge thank you to them. Soon we shall have a new hostel, and its upkeep will be closely monitored in order to maintain the expected standards. This new building will no doubt make a huge difference to many and I for one cannot wait for this project to finish so that our residents can have brand new accommodation.

435 Madam Speaker I now turn your attention to Bridge House. Bridge House was launched a couple of weeks ago. This will become a beacon of light for many men who are transitioning from family home life to finding themselves out on the street.

440 I do not know why my Shadow finds it so funny. Maybe one day you might be able to. Yes, well there you go you now have Bridge House should you need it.

445 Now during my clinics I became aware that there was a need for a place for men who found themselves out on the street after having given up their homes or their matrimonial homes to the wives, partners or children. Madam Speaker there is a list of people for Government Housing and these gentlemen would naturally have to wait the turn on the Housing waiting list. Moreover, if they had been a homeowner and made profit on their house it would even be more difficult to enter the Housing waiting list.

So going through a separation or divorce is a turbulent time for anyone but having Bridge House is a lifeline for those who may need it. This house will help men who are undergoing a separation or a divorce and have left the house to the wife, partner or children. We all know that
 450 paying maintenance, finding a roof over one's head can be an expensive experience especially here in Gibraltar.

A rent for a bed-sit in today's open market would cost anything between £800 to £1,000. Add utility bills, add groceries, self-care, add maintenance, add an ordinary life, soon becomes quite impossible for these men. Bridge House will afford a room like that in a hotel where you will have
 455 a kettle, small fridge, microwave and a small television at a very accessible low rate.

Bridge House will also have kitchen and shower facilities on all floors. The top floor will comprise of open balcony areas, a television area and a larger kitchen area in case they want to sit down together and have a meal and a chat.

Many times, Madam Speaker a problem shared is a problem halved. The fact that these gentlemen have a situation in common with each other means that staying there will help them address some of their issues by talking to someone who will understand what they are going through because they too are in the same boat.

Bridge House will be run as a charity, and it will be run at no cost to the taxpayer, but it will fill the gaping hole that is left when men leave the matrimonial home but want to stay in a close
 465 proximity to the children and family.

Madam Speaker we have men from all ages who find themselves in this predicament. I have had men in their 70s close to their 80s who come to us seeking this kind of help. Obviously, the wives finally had enough. I take that completely back. *(laughter)* Okay no I should drink some water and compose myself. No, it is true that we have men from all ages coming to us and you
 470 know we need to help regardless of whether you are 20, whether you are 75. So, it is indeed a sad reality, but it is becoming more and more common.

The exact criteria are yet to be exact. I have got to really sit down with the group of people and find what criteria we shall be using but the important thing here is that a huge step in the right direction has been taken. This project was well overdue but again it has been the mastermind of the GSLP Liberal Government to do something about it and find a solution and find a solution we
 475 will.

Madam Speaker there are a million brilliant things that this GSLP Liberal Government have done but there has never been a Government who has beaten its record when it comes to the building of affordable Housing. Today we are already signing licences and handing over keys to
 480 those who are now embarking on a new life in their new flats. I have visited Hassan Centenary Terraces, Chatham Views and Bob Peliza Mews and all I can say is that they are spectacular and an absolute masterpiece in architecture and elegance.

I was truly impressed by the quality of the construction in all three estates and from here I would like to congratulate the architects and workforce behind these impressive buildings and of course I must extend my congratulations to all those lucky home buyers and wish them all prosperity and the very best in their new homes. Chatham Views will be ready by February 2026, that is to say seven months from now, and Bob Peliza Mews phase one is due for July 2026, that is to say in a year's time. I went to Chatham Views today and they celebrated because it is done in the construction company is Portuguese, and I asked why you are having a party, and they said
 490 because in Portugal whenever a construction company reaches the top floor and we finish it then we have a huge party for all the workers to celebrate that we got there. So, I went over to see it and I tell you it is impressive.

I am pleased to share that Hassan's Centenary Terraces phase two will be handing out 285 flats imminently. The number of completions up to the 19th of June were 213 and the best news is that
 495 27 Government flats will be returned to Housing. The Gibraltar Residential Properties (GRP) have worked tirelessly putting many hours of hard work to ensure that this onerous task is done as quickly as possible. An enormous thank you goes to the GRP team for the fantastic work done by Jackie and her team.

In keeping with this Government past records on the Housing front, I would like to end by saying that there is reclamation in the horizon and the Gibraltarian dream of many in this community and who are listening to us today, home ownership will once again very soon become a reality. Madam Speaker, whether our hon. Members across the floor like it or not, this GSLP Liberal Government is the Government that keeps on giving and giving and giving and giving and giving. Lastly, a huge thank you to yourself Madam Speaker and to your very able and efficient team for putting up with all of us so many hours and for letting us drink your coffee and eat your biscuits.

Thank you very much. However, I cannot sit down and let something go. Madam Speaker, most of the men in this room may recall having been told off by me at some point in school.

Madam Speaker, I am afraid I'm going to have to do it again. The Hon. Mr Clinton gets an F for fail when it comes to his interpretation of A Tale of Two Cities.

Right, when the hon. Gentleman Member spoke of it was the best of times, it was the worst of times. Dickens was in fact referring to Paris and London, the book is divided into two cities. Paris was the worst of times with its bleakness and its murder, rampage, French Revolution going on and London was magnificent, it was peace and tranquilly, there was jubilation you know. That is what the light and the dark referred to.

Of course, well you compare it to figures which I mean stick to figures which sometimes you do not actually quite get right, but leave literature to the professionals. Now, Paris or the French Revolution whether it was death, destruction etc. But the main theme that runs through that entire book is one of resurrection.

This book is about love, sacrifice, transformation and resurrection, both physical and metaphorical. Now, the resurrection and transformation on both personal and social levels okay. The narrative suggests that Carton, actually you know who Carton was, his sacrificial death secured a new peaceful way for many.

His analysis, Madam Speaker, the hon. Gentleman's analysis would have been much better presented as a comparative piece. For example, Madam Speaker, the death of Carton symbolic to the defeat of the GSD in 2011 which brought peace and jubilation to many and since they have never, since then never found their way back. They must still be in that darkness.

The main theme which are transformation and resurrection is therefore an appropriate symbolic comparison of the resurrection of this GSLP Government, GSLP Liberal Government into Government on that glorious new dawn of the 9th of December 2011 and how since then this community has been transformed, another running theme in the novel, in so many areas. For example, the Mental Health Care Faculty, the building of ten new schools, not to mention the record this Government holds on Affordable Housing, the transformation of Sandy Bay, the Green Powers at Kingsway Tunnel and the general facelift that Gibraltar has had since its resurrection. The Hon. Mr Clinton would do better to have thoroughly studied the book before making such erroneous comparisons on such a complex novel.

By the way, Madam Speaker, the novel ends with a great optimism which is how I now finally end my speech. Thank you.

Madam Speaker: The Hon. Edwin Reyes.

Hon. E J Reyes: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Yes, I see the Hon. Minister of Housing did not have to tell me off because she was not my teacher, she was my colleague. I thought she was going to tell off all the gossip we used to have in the staff in our break time. How I miss those days, but you never know. We might be able to find a location where we can re-enact again those happy moments.

Madam Speaker on the more serious side of things now. I'm going to commence on educational matters. I'm going to do so by citing from an agreement entered into between His Majesty's Government of Gibraltar and NASUWT, for those who wonder what on earth that really means. It's the National Association of School Masters and Union of Women Teachers. I'm told

once upon a time there were two different teaching representative bodies. One was obviously male, one was female. They joined up together and are now known as NASUWT and NASUWT Gibraltar are the ones that the Minister deals with in his day-to-day affairs in education. But they agreed upon a prime aim, and that is *'that the education of all children in should be carried out in a safe environment that is conducive to the progress of children in academic, vocational and social skills in order to ensure the best possible development into adults and or there taking their place within our community'*.

So, Madam Speaker, with this quote in mind, I cannot stress enough the need to ensure we get it absolutely right when we are planning and building school facilities which will serve our children for educational purposes and for the preparation for adult life. Likewise, maintenance of existing school premises needs to be properly and promptly executed. There can be no justifiable excuses why necessary repairs are not carried out quickly and completed at least within a short and reasonable period of time. More so, as most of these buildings we now use the schools are Brand-new constructions and they should be a source of pride for our community.

Madam Speaker, in the estimate book under the Head 44 Subhead 2(41), it shows an estimate of £285,000 for facilities management in respect to schools, but in the financial year 2023/2024 this expenditure came to just under £400,000, and the forecast expenditure for 2024/2025 is just over £400,000. So, although I'm not a mathematician, I am at a loss as to how this estimated expenditure of just £285,000 for the new financial year has been arrived to that.

Otherwise, I will have no option but to predict a shortfall. The Minister for Education has informed this House that 49 new teaching posts will be created as from September 2025. This is indeed welcome news, but it does not provide any solution to what I highlighted last year in this very same debate, and that is that there is only a token provision of £1,000, covering teacher's paternity/maternity leave cover. And I still believe this figure is unrealistic. We have a relatively high number of young teachers who are still well within childbearing ages. The forecast outturn for the financial year 2024/2025 is £488,000 for maternity cover alone. As of present trends, the estimated provision for teachers' maternity stroke paternity cover will once again fall way short by around half a million pounds. So, I think I'm going to predict there a shortfall. Likewise, temporary cover, very similar but slightly different, is again only estimated at £1,000. Despite the logical reality that the more teachers you employ, and we're now going to have a few more, then the higher your expenses for temporary cover will be when these teachers are ordered to stay at home by doctors because they have contracted seasonal influenza or similar illnesses.

I highlighted this last year, and I have been proven right correct because the forecast outturn for 2024/2025, stand that, wait for it. £2,164,000. So, Madam Speaker, perhaps we can have an explanation as to why we have once again been provided with such a misleading, shall we call it, estimated figure for the provision for teachers' cover. The actual expenditure year upon year in respect to this subhead are always way higher than what the estimates show. So, I ask, is it the case that we are simply trying to show a rosy picture, which is not a real one for the future, which does not compare properly to what the reality of the last few years has shown.

Madam Speaker, I think everyone knows that I, together with my hon. Colleague now the Ministry of Housing, we were both school teachers. I as well used to be the president of the Gibraltar Teacher's Association but I think I also speak for her. We are both still people who have very close to heart all matters pertaining to education. Therefore, perhaps you can join me as well, in extending a sincere recommendation to our friend, the Minister for Education, please listen and continue to work as closely as possible with classroom teachers. Albeit, alongside his senior management teams, classroom teachers want to be part of any process that encompasses our education system, and they do want to be involved in meaningful consultation especially before final decisions are taken.

Surely the way forward proposed by our education professionals can only but contribute to the well-being and best possible future of our children. This is something which I hope we can all agree from both sides of the House is paramount.

Madam Speaker, the Hon. Minister did mention the other day that from his point of view there is high job satisfaction among teachers in Gibraltar. I'm not going to dispute that but I do ask him as well to pay attention because sometimes, and I've been a Minister sat on that side of the House, sometimes what one hears is not necessarily what is shared by every member of that profession. So, although there Minister does have an approachable character and perhaps other than his meetings with the official side where he's given the impression that there's high job satisfaction, the occasional walk about Main Street and meeting other classroom teachers might just give him a bit of an insight that at times there is not a high job satisfaction or as high as he had been led to believe.

Madam Speaker, can I say that we should plan ahead and review the courses being offered in our secondary schools so that qualifications earned will serve to prepare today's pupils to become the skilled workforce which Gibraltar will need for tomorrow, more so as the future will be dominated by, I believe, digital technology. The GSD have raised the concept of modern apprenticeships in the past. And we still believe we need to offer more in this field than what we currently provide. Those pupils who do not wish to pursue an academic future need to be provided with opportunities of a modern apprenticeship programme which, if properly structured, have the same standing as higher education. We need to create a gold standard for an apprenticeship programme so that employers have confidence in the system. The time for investment is now, Madam Speaker, not just in a wonderful formal academic education, which heads into higher education establishments like universities, but also in the coordination of training and skills through accredited vocational courses that serve our community's needs.

We must not forget that the ultimate aim of providing a worthwhile education for our future generations. And it is our duty to ensure that all pupils always achieve the maximum potential. If a new building for the College of Further Education is at long last going to become a reality, then we have a golden opportunity to review the academic and vocational programmes offered at this college. It could be an ideal opportunity for us to offer accredited qualifications in respect of established technical and construction trades. And thereby offer an opportunity to those students who are inclined to pursue a career which is based far greater upon practical rather than academic skills.

Gibraltar should be ready for anything which the future may throw upon us. This includes us having the necessary craftsmen and technicians properly trained and qualified for any possible eventuality. It is extremely sad to note that Gibraltar's gradual loss of vocational skills and opportunities. The GSD has pledged that it would make provisions for a college of skills and technology. We believe in guiding more students into engineering and digital skills. And therefore, we renew our commitment to delivering vocational trades and technical skills. We would work with the University of Gibraltar to be able to deliver courses. Leading towards qualifications beyond Levels 1 and 2, which, thanks to the lead of Minister Santos, are currently being offered at the training centre.

The University is getting a good reputation, therefore I suggest that the Hon. Minister aims to offer some Level 3 and Level 4 courses in that respect so she can add another Brownie Point and another free coffee at my expense when we next meet. Madam Speaker, through our secondary schools, BTEC courses have been offered these last few years, and my calculation is that this works out to at least £3,000 a month. Unfortunately, though, the results obtained in some disciplines have not been, let's say, impressive. I sincerely hope that our students improve upon their achievements in the future and that lecturers and students take stock and we perhaps plan better delivery so that we are better prepared for public examinations at the end of that academic year.

I want to be positive, so I want to thank the Minister for Education for keeping to his word. And he did hold a meeting with me outside parliamentary time because as a result of questions I had asked in his Parliament, he kept to his words. And we met in respect of alternative learning centre provisions, what is policy, and entry criteria, and how it works in the schools. I thank him because... He invited the Director of Education to also come along. And that young lady has proved herself to be a very well-knowledge and rich educator. And therefore, her input is extremely

appreciated by me. And I hope that in the future, should similar cases arrive, then the Minister and I can continue to meet that way.

Now, not so much a positive issue. Let me go into the topics of scholarships. If I may denote correctly, I think the Minister said that so far in 2025, he has got sight of some 273 pupils or students who have already started to register themselves as wishing to get mandatory scholarships and so on. And the thing I had referred to last year, was out of 442 scholarships. And he concluded by saying that I think at the moment we have a grand total of 927 students who are benefiting from scholarships. What I don't have, Madam Speaker, and the Minister will recall, I've asked him these questions in the past, is what are the number of students that unfortunately start but do not complete their courses? At one stage when I did ask the Minister provided us with information that there were 226 ex-students who had failed to complete the courses and they had a collective outstanding debt of £1,667,000.

That is taxpayers' money and it makes me think. This money is owed back to Government. This money needed by Government to reinvest back in the scholarships. There are many reasons why a student may have left his studies, but there are equally many reasons of why this money is not being recouped properly and at the correct pace, and perhaps similar to what the Minister of Housing had to do in respect of parking spaces. Perhaps if we start charging a simple interest rate similar to what the Minister for the Savings Bank does at his savings account, that might help some people. Because if I ended up being a guarantor for a student who now owes £5,000, unless as a guarantor I'm being asked to bring that money up, those £5,000 I have sitting with the Hon. Leader of the House who's paid me such a percentage interest, whereas, you know, my debt is there, acquiring no interest rate at all. So, in simple mathematics, I don't think those figures quite work together. So, we have food for thought for the future that the Minister may wish to consider.

On the 22nd of May, I asked questions which the Minister for Education answered in respect of applications for discretionary scholarships and so on, because I was being informed that some students were worried about the delays in being able to apply and so forth. There was a link on the website, but it sent you to a link, which didn't quite work, and the Minister said that they were they were working on these applications and he gave us the impression he was quite satisfied that it would be completed within a few days. It seems that the application dates were eventually opened but it gave a very short window to applicants. It gave them 11 days from the 13th to the 24th of June which includes weekends and some students, those days in June are quite difficult days because they're either rushing to finish off the dissertations or they are madly revising to sit down the final exams. It's that time of year when they're extremely nervous and I make a plea to the Minister that those who've been in contact with his Department of Education after 24th of June, you know, have been told, now sorry the closing days have gone past and so on. And even in the students' appeal, they said, well, you should have paid attention, because the notice came out on Facebook. I don't think any malice was meant. But certainly, it does not meet the nervousness and the frustrations that these students feel, in that they wish to progress. We all wish to see our students attain as high a qualification as possible. And the course had not started until September. You know, the 24th of June went past over a week ago, but perhaps another window of a few extra days now in July might help to calm people down and open a possible future for others.

Madam Speaker, still in scholarships, there was a bit of confusion earlier on this year. A confusion that made people come to a conclusion that there was being a discrimination. Amongst students depends on what school you were attending, whether you're automatically qualified for the mandatory scholarship or not. I know Government has tried to give explanations as time went on, but the reality is that meetings were set up so that students and parents could attend to be briefed on the whole application system for mandatory scholarships and so on. And on the day when one of these meetings is going to be held... Notices started coming through to the headteachers of non-Government schools, saying, no, your students either have been told they're not entitled to get a mandatory, or they shouldn't come to the meeting tonight because a different set of things is going to be made up for them. That brought about great concerns among students

and parents. In fact, to the extent that many parents, although they had heard about the message, still decided to turn up at the briefing that evening. And when they arrived to the venue, there was not a junior, a senior member of staff of the Department of Education there at the door with, to what, if you go back to school days, what the equivalent of a school register, saying name, oh yeah, you're in this school, you can go to that room. No, you are in that school. And words coming through is, no, you not necessarily entitled to a mandatory scholarship. Don't worry, you'll probably get a scholarship under the discretionary title, please go to the other room. I think that has been sorted out, I think, but I'm not entirely certain and I certainly don't have satisfactory reasons of why that happened in the first place. That caused great concern, great stress amongst many families and I received many phone calls, maybe the Minister for Education equally received many calls, but it was something we would all have done without, and I hope if there was any lessons to be learned. That we have learnt about it so that there is no mistake for the future. There needs to be a clear, well written out policy and everyone knows entitled what they are or what they are not entitled to. I beg the Minister please make it a point, we get this ready in time for next year.

Madam Speaker, I know during the year I've tried to pester the Minister several times about the pending TLR posts, and the last time I was able to put a question in was on the 28th of March, where the official reply was that there were still 28 TLR post pending to be allocated on this substantive issue. I gather from the Minister's address that we seem, or he seems to have tackled most of those 28, but it's a real pity to note that, you know, on the last days of this academic year, we have ended the academic year without all those posts having been settled. It just seems to be an unnecessary delay. I don't know whether the Minister for Industrial Relations needs to come in and help if the Minister has a lot of workloads and cannot meet with the teacher representatives as often as possible, then we can share and have a collegiate approach. But we are going to start the academic year 2025/2026 in September and there are still TLR posts that have not been filled in on a substantive basis, exactly the same as we were on the 1st of September 2024. So that's something that needs to be tackled and the sooner the better.

Madam Speaker, another area where there seems to have been a bit of disagreement, if we call it that, was in respect of what dates and what was happening when one of our secondary schools needed to implement the evacuation procedure. The Minister did explain, I accept, he said that in February 2024 there was an inset where he has asked the teachers to start to work towards building up the emergency response plan. And this seems to have been, from the Ministerial point of view, settled by the end of the academic year by June 2024.

But however, when the incident happened in March 2025, staff and pupils were not aware of these procedures. Part of the excuses given was that there had been an exercise to streamline the handbook and that some clerical error or printer's devil had come into the system. There was an admission that it wasn't quite printed out properly in the handbook and this was corrected on the 28th of March, but that date happens to be two days after the incident happened. Most pupils seem to have been able to cope all right on the day of the incident. But some pupils sort of panicked. Some pupils started phoning home, saying, I'm in school. I'm locked in. There's this or the other happening. Unnecessary panic. And you put that panic, Gibraltarian style you can even call it mayhem among some people. All I want to say at this stage is, I hope the Minister agrees that we have to make absolutely certain that come the first day of September, we have as foolproof as possible a system in place That staff are fully aware that pupils within the first few days start to be informed of the system, because hardly a day goes past that one does not come across in the news different places, and not just across the pond on the other side of the Atlantic, but even within Europe, where unwanted visitors have come into educational establishments, and there have been some scenes that lead into panic and this is what we have to work together to avoid happening in Gibraltar so as long as the lessons are learned as long as we have a place in something in place for the future then I want to be able to stand up and say I'm fully supportive for the Minister for having you know gone ahead and make sure he really took the whole setup into task and everything should be as hunky-dory as possible.

One of the topics that I am told keeps on recurring whenever the Minister has meetings with the teachers representative is the concerns being expressed by teachers about disciplinary problems in some schools and they are stressing that urgency is required in solving these.

So, I was looking back at my notes. At one stage, the Minister did answer to me that there were 20 different incidents in school involving 15 pupils that ended up with requiring suspensions of those pupils from school. Obviously, he couldn't go into minor details, but I think he will agree that we have to make clear and have policies understood by all that we will have absolutely zero tolerance of physical or verbal abuse in our schools and that our teachers whom we have to look after do not suffer anymore what other teachers have suffered in the past where they have been physically assaulted and have even ended up leaving the teaching profession. Here the advice and the cooperation of the Royal Gibraltar Police with its new Commissioner might help a long way so let's hope that this really takes effect as from the 1st of September. And who knows, the knock-on effect could be that there are less teachers having to approach the well-being support team, whom again I have asked the Minister for numbers in the past, and when I ask again in the future, I hope these numbers are slowly but surely coming down.

I shall wait to see, Madam Speaker, what happens in respect of the pouch system for phones that the Minister referred to. In my note he said that it will be implemented for years 7 to 11 by January. There must be a reason why it's not going to be implemented on the 1st of September. Maybe it's a question of getting in the equipment and so on. I give him the benefit of the doubt. I just hope that because there are as many opinions about the need to have a phone available to students in school. There are many opinions and there are people that this is explained properly to parents that the teachers who will have to police, or not police, the system feel comfortable with what they're going to be asked to do so that if it's for the betterment of education, then it will receive our support, but certainly a good explanation and a good dissemination of information to parents, pupils and teaching staff alike would help to make life as easy as possible.

Madam Speaker, I was surprised that, in his honest answer, the Minister said that they don't particularly have any plans for building new schools with what we predict is going to be movement of families to live more on the east side. It takes me back many years, I think it was probably 1990, when as a member of the teachers' union, we met with the then Minister for Education. Who for years had no longer been a Member of this house. And we were talking about concerns of the future needs of schools in the West Side Reclamation Area. And he was dismissed completely by that Minister saying, "*nah, there's not going to be that many young families and so on living there, so we don't need to spend X million of pounds doing the school there*". Time proved him wrong because we ended up. Having to move Bishop Fitzgerald from where the College of Further Education is now, they had to move down to the west, the west side area. Governor's Middle School was moved down to that area. The present Government invested in making new buildings there to cater for the number of people. So, it's a good end result in 2025. But in 1990, you know, teachers were being made to believe that we had a bit of a fantasy in our mind. In saying that schools will be required in that area. We were proved right. It may have taken 30 odd years, but we were proved right. And all I want to say is, you know, please bear in mind and take stock on an annual or biannual basis what the movement of families are in respect of the east side and when and where exactly what we need to have buildings there.

And when we come up with buildings and so on, nice as brick and mortar look and so on, it is what's provided in the inside, what the facilities and the tools to deliver the lessons are that really make a difference. We know at the moment, we have mixed ability teaching in primary schools with lots of support from LSAs and so one, but that I'm told is not the case nowadays in secondary schools. In secondary schools, the main complaints from the teaching professionals seem to come in the area that there's a lack of streaming, a lack of ability sets, and that this contributes to give rise to the behavioural issues. So when the Minister is setting out his, or preparing with his Director of Education, the insert days for this coming academic year, perhaps he wants to dedicate some time there to get feedback from the teachers on their 2025/2026 feeling in respect of alternative curriculums for our students, those who are years 7 to 13, and tied up together with

810 what I think they have in mind, which is a new pre-16 years of age pathway into the College of Further Education, so that by working together, we can offer alternative support and the proper structure to those students, so that at the end of the day, we assist them in obtaining as high an academic preparation for future adult life.

815 Students have to attain the best academic results according to their abilities and I wish the Minister and all the staff of the Department of Education the best of luck in that as they juggle between that and having to give careers advice which again we seem to be progressing, but from my opinion, perhaps not progressing as fast enough as we could. I wish the Minister the best of luck in what I believe he still has not finished a full consultation with parents and teachers in respect of perhaps doing away with the half days and altering the school calendars. And if I'm not
820 mistaken, he led us to believe that if that did happen, it would take place at the very last term of the 2025/2026 academic year. But again, look at the past, we need lots of time to debate it, shall we call it that, to get feedback, to get input from parents, teachers, and why not some students alike, so that the best results come up, always bearing in mind what is in the best interest of pupils.

825 And, Madam Speaker, I cannot sit down without, and I like to remind you the Minister, which he always says he's working on it, He said needs to update some words in the national curriculum regulations that doesn't need a Bill that's just an amendment through the Second Supplement of the Gazette we still have titles there of the general education advisor and so on posts that no longer exist and I like being a pest so therefore I shall press him again please get someone to start looking into the correct nomenclatures as provided in that in that area of legislation.

830 Madam Speaker, can I say in favour of teachers that teachers have for so long silently and diligently got on with the underappreciated and deeply challenging job of providing an education formal and otherwise to generation after generation of Gibraltarians. No one has been more critical of Government spending than this GSD party have over the last 14 years now. We however advocate prudence and pointed to the dangers of uncontrolled spending. This does not however
835 amount to austerity. It is about prioritising Government spending in areas where it is needed and where as a society we're going to get the greatest benefits and the teaching profession is one of those such areas that it serves. Our full support.

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Health, Education...

840

Hon. E J Reyes: I'm talking on education matters today. It's my alma mater.

Madam Speaker, carrying on now with other portfolios, I am a firm believer in unity where possible and above all for the benefit and greater interest of Gibraltar. Therefore, I'm really glad to see that today's Government continues with the long-standing cross-party policy held by
845 successive Governments to assist all local sporting bodies. To overcome any foreign Government's politically inspired attempts to block our memberships of international sporting bodies. The shameful actions taken by our neighbours to the north are each day wearing thinner and I pray that slowly but surely other international sports governing bodies will judge Gibraltar's applications on their own merits and not shamefully allow themselves to be coerced by our
850 neighbours unjustified. And often unscrupulous arguments. I rejoice on hearing that Gibraltar Rugby have recently attained a favourable international court ruling and that they are now on a firm course to become members of the international governing body.

The Hon. Minister and I, I think, shared, and I think even Minister Arias, I saw some such there. We all spent some time encouraging our rugby fraternities this weekend and that feeling of being
855 on a high and looking forward to the future and therefore in case you have any doubts I want to assure everyone that the GSD will continue to give its whole hearted support not only to rugby but to all sporting associations in their continuing battles to obtain while they still don't have it international membership or the respective international sporting bodies.

860 **Hon. Chief Minister:** and yet he won't support our new stadium...

Hon. E J Reyes: The Gibraltar Football Association have a long-standing project towards cutting out refurbishment and upgrading of their own national stadium. We agree that Gibraltar needs a new stadium, but we have expressed serious misgivings about the project as envisaged. For years, the Government have promised that the construction of a new Stadium would be at no cost to taxpayers, but yet Loans have been granted through the GFA for this project. I ask are the loans which, to our knowledge, the Chief Minister once said in his house was £2,040,000. I need to ask, have those been repaid? Because the GFA, through his own statement, said on the 3rd of June... That they would be reimbursing that amount have been lent to them or forwarded to them within the next few weeks and that today being the 4th of July is over a month old so it would be interesting to know where we are in respect of that just over two million pounds loan.

Importantly, despite what was publicly known about the new Victoria Stadium, there are concerns that the needs for development of the footballing community, and new football in particular, are not being met within the GFA's projects. Despite their ambitious project, sporting facilities across all disciplines, I believe there's still a great need for further training facilities if our future generations are to aspire to improving their overall standards. It continues to break my heart to see so many Gibraltar-registered teams across several sports having to go over to Spain in order to train in preparation for local and international competitions. Indeed, Madam Speaker, more facilities are needed if we are to continue to aspire progressing beyond the qualification stages in respect of international competitions. And I know some international stages are taking place, I think, next Tuesday, which parliamentary timetable permitting some of us hope to attend.

The GSD continues to believe that alongside the new football facilities, which could be enjoyed by the football fraternity, there is still a greater need for extensive training facilities to be, to be available in Gibraltar and for participants in other sports other than football. Those facilities should ensure that the introduction and development of our youngsters into the world of sports, very often arising from our schools, curriculums and sporting clubs' commitments, are equally catered for.

Madam Speaker as you well know, Gibraltar very often obtains results which make our neighbours and sporting opponents in official competitions envious of our rather good and consistent outcomes. I sincerely hope that the new constructions and or improvements to sporting facilities will meet the requirements and they will continue to do so for many more years to come. Many Gibraltarians are currently actively involved and preparing to proudly represent Gibraltar at the 2025 Small Island Games, which I believe the Hon. Minister will be there cheering on behalf of all Members on this and that side of the House. So, I am sure I speak for the whole House, as we offer our collective best wishes to all participants, who through their committed efforts and hard training will yet again make us proud of our sporting achievements. We collectively wish the best of Gibraltarian luck to our national representatives and I trust the Minister will pass on that message.

Madam Speaker, we should record a special mention in respect to the fantastic achievements attained by several sporting bodies throughout this past year. There is always a danger when you start to mention individual sporting teams or associations that you may accidentally leave somebody out. If other associations, all I can say is that if other associations are able to match the enthusiasm and the results obtained By Special Olympics Gibraltar, then, Madam Speaker, all investments we make in sports are certainly worthwhile.

Madam Speaker, I sadly note that upon the opening of the bathing season this year, not all facilities had been properly prepared for use. I came across several complaints referring particularly to the bathing pavilion adjacent to what is known as the GASA swimming pool. This location is very popular with our senior citizens and with those families who are members suffering from disabilities. And I hope these facilities, if they are now completely ready, are properly maintained throughout the summer months, and that we are not subject once again to numerous comments from members of the public, especially those endless ones that come up on social media, but they are correct when the hoist is not ready to help people with mobility problems get to the sea and so on. Knowing the Minister, I think he probably has it working by

now, but certainly on the day that it opened, it was a big disappointment that those were not yet there ready.

915 Madam Speaker I wish to reaffirm my personal convictions that through the collective celebration of social events, participating Gibraltarians contribute towards reinforcing our identity, our culture and our history as a people and as a community. Both the performing and fine arts fraternities have always proved themselves to be very proactive within their own specialised areas and I take this opportunity to congratulate All the groups and individuals who
920 have done Gibraltar are extremely proud through their international participation and in many cases even gaining top awards. It is always a personal and I'm sure collective pleasure to be able to say how proud we all are of the international achievements of our fellow Gibraltarians.

I must again raise up the topic because during the last term in Office The Government had purchased both the Queens Cinema, and the Queens Hotel sites for the development of a National
925 Theatre and related activities. We know that the National Theatre will not be built at the original earmark site, as other private developments have been announced for this location. With the development project in respect of a National Theatre now falling under the planning remit of a charitable trust, this house has lost sight of projected costs. And much as we try, Government does not provide any updates at question time as to the progress of this project. I note that in this
930 year's estimates, once again, it shows a token provision of £1,000 under the Improvement and Development Fund expenditure set aside under Head 102 Projects Subhead 4(K) or Kilo. Entitled Theatre. Given the appeal that the Charitable Trust has made to the general public and to the business community to sponsor items for the theatre, I ask how far is the £1,000 in Governments estimate expected to reach given the cost of materials nowadays? Will there or will there not,
935 Madam Speaker, be a Government financial investment towards making the national theatre a reality.

Locals may often be heard to say that surely our home-grown performers, our entertainers, and our audiences are entitled to ask for a theatre which is fit for purpose and available throughout the 365 days of the year. I ask, Madam Speaker, will Government commit itself to a
940 definitive date by when theatre lovers may enjoy performances at a new and much-needed theatre?

Madam Speaker, I'm coming to the end, so before I sit down, I must take this opportunity to thank you personally and your staff once again for the patient way in which you have all dealt with us Elected Members. I know that all members of staff, without exception, are always available to
945 advise Members on both sides of this House. But, Madam Speaker, to see this being done in an efficient and joyful manner makes life so much easier for all of us Elected Members.

Madam Speaker let me embarrass someone, our new Clerk has personally proved himself of being worthy to hold this position in our Parliament. I personally want to thank him, Madam Speaker, for his organisational skills and his support to all the delegates when we recently
950 attended the regional Congress Parliamentary Conference in Cardiff, Wales. He had to babysit four middle-aged and one Senior Citizen man and he certainly proved his worth by looking after us.

Madam Speaker it is by travelling with others that you experience an opportunity to get to know them better. And I have to say without a shadow of a doubt, Mr. Clerk has certainly obtained our respect.

955 So, Madam Speaker, having said all that in short and simple terms, having said what I think of the lack of details in respect to Government's explanations about the Appropriation Bill, I unfortunately have to confirm to you that I have no option but in conscience I have to say I will not be supporting the Bill.

960 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Well Madam Speaker there is much to agree with in what the Hon. Mr. Reyes has said about the Clerk, but of course it is the first time it has ever been suggested that the vote on an Appropriation Bill is a matter of conscience. Perhaps it is a moment where we might all wish to clear our minds for a moment or two. The Deputy Chief Minister and I have just received

965 some documentation that we have to look at this evening so I propose that the House should return at 6:30 p.m. to continue with the speeches.

Madam Speaker: The House will recess until 6:30 p.m.

The House recessed at 5.46 p.m. and resumed its sitting at 6.30 p.m.

970

Madam Speaker: The Hon. D J Bossino.

975 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Madam Speaker, this is commonly referred to as the graveyard shift. It is not a term I like to use, but I will term it now as a Wine Festival shift because that wonderful festival is about to start at Chatham in the next half an hour. I may be slightly—nightlife—I may be slightly longer than that, but let's see.

980 The role that I have been assigned by my friends—my lovely friends here on the Opposition—is to be the sweeper. And I will not be sweeping necessarily rubbish, but I will be sweeping a lot of nonsense that we have heard from the other side. Because it is true, as the Hon. Ms Orfila has said, the hon. Ladies and Gentlemen do give, give, give, but they give a lot of deflection and nonsense, which is what we have been treated to over the last week (*Banging on desks*) because that is, in effect, all that they have on offer.

985 The Chief Minister has already indicated on more than one occasion that he will not be seeking re-election next time round (*Banging on desks*). And what I would ask him to do—and I would call upon him—is to move from his position sooner rather than later. The sooner he does it, the better. And I say that because he has lost all political credibility, if I may say so. The hon. Gentleman is, in effect, in a Sir Tony Blair post-WMD—Weapons of Mass Destruction—moment, when he is simply not believed. And if he wants to sell this wonderful deal and agreement that he has entered into with the EU and the Kingdom of Spain, it would probably be better, I advise him, that it be done by somebody else. But it is obvious, Madam Speaker, that he is enlisting the support not just of former Chief Ministers, which he is wheeling out to support his position, but also former Members of his Government, and that is because he simply cannot be believed by the people out there.

995 Now, you could very easily ask: well, why would we call upon a candidate who came second in the last Election, who clearly no longer has the support of the electorate out there, to leave his post? You may ask that. But I say so from a more serious basis, because I think that power and hubris have now gone to his head. And that is not good for his Government. It is, more importantly, not good for Gibraltar—therefore, he must go.

(Interjections...)

1000 I say that—that must be causing some excitement. What I have just said must be causing some excitement in their ranks: those “wannabe” Chief Ministers. And I will be mentioning some of them once again, as I did last year. I would refer, in that regard, to their incessant continuing internal campaigns emanating from Mrs Vasquez and Mr Feetham in particular. And I would simply have this word to say to the Hon. Mr Santos: he misses the point. He misses the point that we have made in the past about social media. The point is that a very professionally done media campaign is being paid for by the taxpayer. The taxpayer is paying for the leadership campaigns of the GSLP and the Liberals—well, the GSLP in particular.

(Interjection: Not true.)

1010 Well, I think Mr Feetham is fine. Mr Feetham's videos are more raw; they are less professional. So, he says “not true”. It may be that that applies to him, but certainly not to Mr Santos or to Mrs Vasquez.

(Interjection by Hon. G Arias Vasquez.)

Now, Mr Feetham is boasting—well, there was a change of name, she is right, to go up in the ballot paper, no doubt. Mr Feetham is boasting about the biggest intake of corporate tax, because that is what he is saying. But, of course, Mrs Vazquez—

(Interjection by Hon. G Arias Vasquez.)

—the Minister for Health, has much more of a rough ride. And she needs to be slightly beware, be on guard, as far as the Hon. the Chief Minister is concerned. Her friend and colleague for many years, they went to the same university. And her staunchest supporter—he has said so publicly in the past that he would want her to succeed him and be the first woman Chief Minister. But the reality is that she needs to be very careful about her political godfather, because he has landed her, in effect—excusing the pun—with a hospital pass. That is what he has done, although she says that that is what she wanted. But be wary, be very wary, Mrs Arias Vasquez, of Al Capone's kiss of death. Be very wary of that—his kiss of death.

She has been the subject of demonstration after demonstration from both Unions in Gibraltar in relation to the GHA, as was very ably—

(Interjection: como Thatcher.)

—I'm going to Thatcher now—as was very ably set out by my learned friend and hon. Friend and colleague, Mrs Ladislaus. And what is very dangerous, in my view, and very sad, is that in answers to questions from my learned and hon. Friend Mrs Ladislaus, the Minister was incapable of even acknowledging that one of the causes of complaints was indeed patient safety. I mean, can it get any worse than that?

Mrs Ladislaus was able to do a forensic analysis of all the placards that were there at the demonstration, which she was more than entitled to have attended. And she did attend. But what I give her is some unsolicited advice—at the risk of being accused of mansplaining—but I will give her a bit of unsolicited advice: she needs to develop a thicker skin. Because both my friends, Mrs Ladislaus and Mrs Sanchez—who is not here with us today for reasons of health, as we know—have different styles. But, my goodness, are they able to rattle her cage!

(Interjections...)

In my view, due to the very good work of new Members who had joined us a couple of years ago—and we rightfully applaud *(Banging on desks)*—as I said earlier, she needs to be careful, because, in my view, during the course of this debate, Mr Feetham is having the upper hand, precisely because he is able to boast of something positive, although we will say something about that later on, on the intake of corporate tax. So, she needs to be very careful. And it does not bode well for the Chief Minister, who is not seeing his plan come to fruition. He is, in effect, putting their noses out of joint, because it is not going according to plan.

It is even more pointed because Mr Feetham was an archenemy of the Hon. Chief Minister. We cannot forget the political history—

(Interjection: Yes, but not this one.)

—no, this one. This one was an archenemy of the Hon. Chief Minister—

(Interjection: the hon. Member opposite.)

—the hon. Member opposite, the Hon. Minister, many, many years ago. And we will keep on reminding him of that political history.

(Interjection: I've got a few things...)

Yes, I'm sure you will say so in your response video on Facebook later on today. Because he was sat round the Executive table of the GSD only seven or eight years ago—that's what Mr Feetham was.

(Interjection: and you wanted to leave...)

Yes, well, I'll say something. I'll say something about that. Mr Feetham has already expressly stated—so we have the Chief Minister, who is not going to be standing again, who supports Mrs Vazquez, and Mr Feetham, who has already indicated that he will put his hat in the ring once the position becomes vacant. I mean, what a dog's dinner!

(Interjection: that's a good thing...)

1065 But I hope—though I know he is already reacting—I hope Mr Feetham realises that this is a legitimate political observation that I make, right? And I hope I do not provoke his ire, as I’m clearly already doing, and provoke him to issue another video in response to what I say. But look, if that is what he does, I look forward to it.

1070 He said, in last year’s video, that I was subjecting him to a personal attack. It is not a personal attack. I am very fond of him. He sat around the same table with me in politics, on this side of the GSD. It is not personal to him; it is a political point that I put to him. And I do not seek to damage him personally. This is a political point that I make.

1075 And, you know, what I do suggest to the Hon. Mr Feetham is to come across. He will be forgiven. He needs to come back to us and then, immediately, we can form Government. How about that? Prodigal son indeed! You are very welcome to sit around the Executive table of the GSD once again.

(Interjections...)

1080 That’s right. Look, we all have our political histories. I was a Member of the Gibraltar National Party and the Liberal Party. And yes, indeed—well, not all of us, but certainly the Deputy Chief Minister and the Chief Minister. I have no difficulty in recognising that. No, it is there.

1085 But look, what Mr Feetham needs to do is come back to us. Now, what we saw the other day was a rather odd, but raw, video—odd but raw—it did not look professional at all—of the Hon. Mr Feetham walking up to the European Parliament. It was quite weird in many respects. He was on his own, nobody was talking to him, and he was there simply to make the point that he was going there, he was at the seat of European power to convince and to delist Gibraltar. Nobody was around him, so in that sense it was odd. But he was seen walking towards the European Parliament building.

1090 As my hon. Friend, Mr Clinton, reminds me—at the point I was going to make—he said he was going to resign if he wasn’t successful in that endeavour. So why—oh, so he’s making a distinction, is he? He is now making distinctions. But all he needs to do, and all I encourage him to do, is simply—certainly—to resign from the Members opposite.

But come over here. Join us. Join us! Yes, leave the dark side!

But it is obvious. He needn’t have said anything. It is obvious that Mrs Arias Vazquez is the apparent heir—

(Interjections: Hon...)

1095 —the Hon. Mrs Arias Vazquez, Minister for Health, and those other 50% of the Government portfolios, is the apparent heir, because she is the winner of “Bust a Budget”—more of that later. The Hon. Chief Minister makes it absolutely clear, not necessarily in his express words—although he has done so as well—but also in the things he gives her to do. I mean, I cannot think how many opportunities he has given her to stand in for him, for the Chief Minister.

1100 I went, as my hon. Friend Mr Origo went, to the GFIU Fund’s dinner a month, a month and a half ago. The Minister for Financial Services quite properly stood and spoke. And then we had Mrs Arias Vazquez speaking for the Hon. the Chief Minister. I mean, for goodness’ sake, there was no need for that. Mr Feetham spoke first—spoke very well—about financial matters; he is the Financial Services Minister, in a fund’s dinner. There was no need for the Hon. Mrs Arias Vazquez, 1105 on that occasion, to speak—but there she was.

She was last week at the Pride event, speaking—not just Mr Santos, but also Mrs Arias Vazquez, the Hon. Mrs Arias Vazquez—on behalf of who? The Hon. Chief Minister.

(Interjection: Were you there? Were you there at the Pride event?)

1110 Yes, absolutely. She also spoke again for the Hon. Chief Minister. For Chief Minister, she also stood in for him at the Gibraltar Day in London. We even were shown—I think it was Mrs Ladislaus who sent it to me—a photo of the Hon. Arias Vazquez, with a resplendent smile, shaking hands there, I think in No. 6, with the new Commissioner. And you had the image of Mr Feetham, the Minister for Justice, sulking behind her.

(Interjections)

1115 The promotion is constant. This is not lost on the electorate. It is not lost on people. We are being subjected to an internal leadership campaign, and the taxpayer is paying for this. The taxpayer is paying for every penny.

(Interjection: Not true, Madam Speaker)

Not true—but I'm speaking.

1120 She is the one, the hon. Lady and Minister, who sits to the immediate left. She does not quite dislodge the Deputy Chief Minister—he is there to the Chief Minister's immediate right. The hon. Lady sits to the Chief Minister's immediate left, right beside the seat of power. She is already nearly there; she is very close. So, I am doing her a favour when I call upon the Chief Minister to resign and to move on.

1125 But the hon. Lady needs to be aware—because she may not be—that whenever Mr Feetham has the opportunity and she is not in the Chamber; he will plonk his posterior on that chair. And he speaks from there. At one point, when I saw him standing up and answering questions from there, I did not even appreciate that that was technically possible. But I think we all assigned numbers—so that maybe, because now the new staff does this, and it is not done externally at the Isle of Man—and he was able to answer questions from there.

He actually took the first opportunity, because he must be salivating at the possibility of sitting in the Chief Minister's chair. That is what is happening. And he took the opportunity. So, the hon. Lady needs to be careful. That is, again, my unsolicited advice to her. And in relation to the corporate tax intake—we have here, watch that. (*Banging on desks...*)

1135 Okay, now. What we have—for the viewer who is not seeing this—well, most of them are now having nice drinks at the Wine Festival. Unless we have a massive screen in Chatham showing this live as it happens... What we are seeing here and being subjected to is—oh no, he's already getting nervous; he's going back, he is going back. Oh, I thought that, for the first time in a long friendship and acquaintance, the Chief Minister had actually paid attention to what I was saying and had resigned his position and moved over to Mr Feetham's seat.

But in relation to the corporate tax intake... I mean, it was a rather muted response from the Hon. Mr Picardo—muted and subdued—to the Hon. Mr Feetham. Where was the effusion? Where was the effusion?! I mean, he saved his financial bacon as the Minister for Finance—that's what he did this year—and more about Mr Feetham's defence of that later on, but that's what he did. And he was rather subdued; all he said was, "*I commend Mr Feetham*," and it was totally flat the way he said it because he didn't really feel it. I have known him for too long; he didn't feel it.

He actually made a point about his nervous laughter—which we are experiencing now again. He said, "*Oh look, he's laughing nervously*." He was much more effusive—well, I say much more, slightly more effusive—in relation to Sir Joe Bossano, who hasn't been in this Chamber throughout the proceedings. But when he referred to the Hon. Sir Joe Bossano's steady stewardship, it was a bit more than "*commend*". That's all he was capable of coming up with when he was referring to the £50 million, £60 million increase in revenue which Mr Feetham, as a result of his wonderful tax strategy, was able to secure for us and for the benefit of Gibraltar.

1155 We also see this childish behaviour, but it is reflective of something quite serious, because I think it reflects the internal divisions which are very palpable and very obvious on the Government benches. And that affects all of us, because it could have at some point—when the Hon. Chief Minister leaves—a serious issue of governmental stability.

(Interjections...)

No, well, sometimes I doubt whether I should, but I'll stay with him going for all the reasons that I said. But even in respect of the slots—the slot with a graveyard in the afternoon, during summer hours when half the population is at the beach, or now, on a Friday evening at the Wine Festival to boot,

(Interjection: Order...)

or in the morning—we know who is favoured there. We know who has been favoured there.

1165 Mr Cortes—sorry, the Hon. Professor John Cortes, the Minister for the Environment, et cetera—he's not doing too well. He was given an afternoon slot. Last year he was given a morning

slot. Sir Joe Bossano was given a morning slot—presumably out of respect. Although some—yes, I’ll say something else about that gentleman and his leadership prospects. Of course, the Hon. Mrs Arias Vazquez was given a morning slot. Mr Bruzon was given a morning slot—so he’s doing quite well. But the rest were all given the afternoon slots, when viewership comes down, people are more tired, and some even doze off.

Mr Feetham—he was given an afternoon slot. And even—actually—even the Hon. Minister for Housing, Ms Orfila, was given afternoon slots when it was completely unnecessary, because we were doing very well this morning. We could have progressed and given her a morning slot. Possibly, because she’s on the Bossano side of the party, she was given an afternoon slot.

(Interjections...)

I’m not too sure about that.

But these are all childish and immature antics. But it is typical of the hon. Member’s modus operandi, and it is typical of his attitude, and the attitude of many of them, who are simply wishing to—excuse me—pursue their own personal ambitions, and less about the greater public good and public service.

So, this is simply a concerning game of thrones, which we are all seeing with our very eyes and, as I said before, Mr Santos and Mrs Vasquez are continually surrounding themselves with hired press people to pursue at least one of their leadership campaigns.

And let me just say a word about the Hon. Professor Cortes—the ego-driven Minister—who very clearly has his own personal ambitions, despite his protestations to the contrary. He does have ambitions for the top job. I was told only a few days ago by somebody who was having a conversation—typical in Gibraltar, people are interested in politics—about this internal feud between the Hon. Minister for Health and the Hon. Minister for Financial Services, with him, with the hon. Gentleman. And he said, very quickly: *“No, I also have ambitions. I can also be Chief Minister. I also want to be Chief Minister.”*

That was reported to me the other day, and I actually believe it—it has the ring of truth to it—because we saw it: a very obvious leadership bid during his intervention on Monday, which was the most interesting part of his speech. Those are the bits which are the most interesting parts of both Mr Cortes’s speech and Mr Feetham’s speech, by the Honourable.

But can we at least agree—can we at least agree to one thing—that he is not “not a politician”? Can we at least agree that? I mean, he keeps on saying that, but now, come on, it rings hollow. It’s not true. He is very much a politician. And maybe that’s his tactic—to come across as humble, to come across as something else—but actually he does want it. And the Hon. Minister said that he is more excited and with more energy than ever. There you go—a leadership bid coming through very clearly.

And this could be a three-horse race, a four-horse race... I mean, if this carries on, we’re going to have potentially the entire Cabinet at it. But let’s say a six-horse race. Let us say a six-horse race. Because I hear —through the grape vine—that the Hon. Sir Joe Bossano is also a potential future contender. Or indeed, could it be the quiet, quiet Deputy Chief Minister? The difficulty that the hon. Member has is that he leads the Party in alliance with the GSLP. But I think that he may also have egocentric concerns in that department and may therefore harbour a personal ambition to one day not be number two and actually sit in the hot seat in No. 6.

(Interjection: I’ve heard him described as many things, but egocentric...)

So, indeed, as I said before, the social-media-obsessed Mr Santos, with his professionally done videos, may be an indication of that.

(Interjections...)

Yes, there’s a bit more—there’s going to be a bit more—you can relax.

So, what is clear is that the Hon. Chief Minister needs to go. That is very clear in my mind. His time is up. And whilst he may think that he’s experienced a bit of a flip as a result of the announcement of the agreement, I’m not too sure that he has. I think, if that’s what he thinks, he may be experiencing and undergoing a grave error of judgement. But he agrees with me that he needs to go. I think where we may disagree is with the timings. I’m saying now! I’m saying go now,

so that we can have a change at the top as soon as possible, for the reasons that I have alluded to.

So, in respect of the points that the Hon. Chief Minister made in support of, and commending, this Bill to the House, I must say that it was flat and defensive in tone. It's not the contribution that I'm used to from the Hon. Chief Minister in past years. He has certainly lost some fire in his belly. He's certainly lost a lot of belly—and maybe has lost some fire with it. So, he predicted that they, as a result of our speeches, were going to be treated to the same old mantra and hyperbole. Was he talking about himself, I wonder? Because we were certainly subjected to the same old mantra and hyperbole from the Hon. the Chief Minister.

And he says that what I say is that our job is to “attack, attack”. I mean, a bit rich, coming from the Leader of the GSLP. We all know our political history. That is what Sir Joe Bossano used to do constantly. He was Mr Opposition incarnate—where he used not just his position here as Leader of the Opposition or Leader of other Parties but also his position in the Union. That's legend. That was attack. That was attack, and subject this community to many hours of strikes incessantly for the pursuit of power. And this is coming from the Leader and his immediate successor, the Hon. Fabian Picardo, accusing me of saying that that is our job – a bit rich!

He says that his speech was brutal. That is his description. But I don't agree with it, actually. I thought it was quite lame. Let's see his reply on Monday, whenever it arrives.

And he chose to attack my hon. Friend Mr Clinton. I wanted to understand why he did that, but he decided, for whatever tactical reason, that on this occasion Mr Clinton—and I got a bit of a drubbing, the Leader of the Opposition—but the full-frontal attack was on my friend Mr Clinton.

But of course, he fell flat on his face on this business of the interest payments and the loan. He fell flat on his face. In that regard—not in every regard, but in that regard—he was a sheep in sheep's clothing. It simply fell flat on its face, and it was completely and utterly demolished by the Hon. Leader of the Opposition in his reply to his contribution.

And Mr Clinton's reputation was far from shot—far from shot. It was totally and utterly ineffective and it fell flat on its face. Because he is saying—he said, in the context of the interest rates—that there was no art nor science to this. It was a gamble, which, on this occasion, worked. But he attributed to Mr Clinton comments and points which he didn't actually make. The *chivato*, as he likes to call it—Hansard—told a different story, as was very ably and expertly set out in his exposition of the position by the Hon. Leader of the Opposition.

But I may not be a Nostradamus—“Nostradamon” not be a Nostradamus—I'm more than willing to concede and accept that. Neither is he. Neither is he, because he was super-confident that he was going to win handsomely—not just by the skin of his teeth with 130 or 150 votes—he was super-confident that he was going to win handsomely and comfortably in the last General Election. But he saw it almost slipping away from him until there was a sudden change at four in the morning, and Sir Joe Bossano was able to secure a seat in the House. But on Friday the 13th—unlucky for some, unlucky for some—the Hon. Chief Minister only just managed to get past the post, and, my goodness, he was in a foul mood in that GBC interview that morning.

So, the Hon. the Leader of the Opposition showed how bad the hon. Members opposite are at predicting Departmental Expenditure when, year on year, they are much higher than envisaged. But, you know, the Hon. the Chief Minister keeps on referencing our client selection. He has his obsession with the GSD and its performance two years ago on the 12th October. But what about his? What about the process that he subjected himself to in respect of candidate selection, in respect of which we are seeing a very expensive legacy to that with the Supreme Court case in the Murga matter? It's very obvious where that comes from. Everybody talks about it.

And why is it that he expects me to apologise to Knightsfield Holdings Limited? This has nothing to do with Knightsfield Holdings, or its directors, or its shareholders—nothing to do with them. Why do they twist things and try to make it personal between me and them?

But it has everything to do with the Government and what they are doing. Because the fact is that the taxpayer is spending this year £1.412 million, and last year £1.392 million. What do we get in return? That is the value-for-money argument that I put. I do not need to apologise to

Knightsfield Holdings Ltd or their directors, and I do not apologise to them for raising this point—incessantly, if need be.

(Interjections)

Well, a bit more about that also. They boast of increased revenue in relation to the Upper Rock, he says, but it is an obvious point. They keep on increasing the fees to access the Upper Rock—it is an obvious point. But the expected £15 million estimated revenue for this year is based on an assumption that the tourists will keep on coming. That is the assumption.

But doesn't the Hon. Minister, Mr Cortes, and indeed the Chief Minister—who made this point during the course of his initial address—ask what legacy, what effects, these hikes may have on continuing numbers? I am not saying that they will come down; I am not being Nostradamus and predicting that. All I am saying is that there is a risk that if you keep on increasing the fees and you don't improve the product—which hasn't been improved yet—then you may end up with fewer numbers coming in, so that the £15 million figure may be far too ambitious.

And they keep on saying, using this mantra and argument, that the taxpayer doesn't pay—but the taxpayer certainly loses out because of their, in effect, parcel privatisation of the Upper Rock. I mean, one simply needs to look at this year's expected expenditure in respect of the ticketing system for sites management systems, which increases from about £3.72 thereabout a million to £6 million—almost double. And what do we spend on repairs and maintenance? £150,000. That is fantastic. That is fantastic.

The reality is that, in relation to the Upper Rock, my position is that what they have discovered is a treasure trove—a bit like the Gibraltar Savings Bank—and they are going to milk it for all that they possibly can.

Let me give the Chief Minister a bit of a history lesson in relation to the Knightsfield Holdings contract. It was inherited by us from them—that was the position.

(Interjection: in 2004...)

It was actually terminated by us when we created the Agency. It was they, on that fateful day on 8th November, when they won that election, who then reintroduced and entered into fresh contractual arrangements with that same company. But we stopped it, and we created the Agency.

And in relation to that same company—with subcontracts to another company in relation to the Moorish Castle—the Hon. Minister Cortes is not able to answer questions because he said: *"Oh no, that's contracted by Knightsfield Holdings Ltd."* That is an issue of lack of democratic principle which guides them, which is the point that my learned and hon. Friend, Mr Azopardi, as Leader of the Opposition, made in his intervention.

How can they really sit there? How can the Hon. Chief Minister really sit there and say, with all the gall, that they are the most transparent Government ever? How is this possible? Nobody believes them—only just.

(Interjection)

But the point that my friend the Leader of the Opposition also made, which is a very valid one in the context of a Government which, yes, publishes more information than we used to online—yes, "useless", Mr Clinton says—but actually that claim simply holds no water whilst they continue with a parallel Government and lack of transparency in the Gibraltar Savings Bank and the National Economic Plan run by Sir Joe Bossano.

They cannot claim that they are the most transparent Government when it is not capable of being properly scrutinised by us. In relation, for example, more recently, when, as a result of a question that I posed—on the back of a letter that the Hon. Sir Joe Bossano had written to depositors of the Savings Bank, stating that investments had been made to improve post-war housing—I think it was... Not a dickie bird from the Hon. Minister for Housing in relation to that in her intervention.

This is the point—the hon. Member is the Minister for Housing. I'm sure if I had asked her about that—*"It's not mine, it is Sir Joe Bossano"*—I've been here for long enough; I've had that before in relation to other Ministers for Housing. I've had that, and that is the travesty. That is the

point of criticism. That is why we continue to be exercised in relation to this point—because we don't know where this is going.

1325 In relation to that point specifically, the hon. Gentleman said: *"Please, this may be a good idea to tackle and deal with a particular housing need."* No, I'm not telling you. And then he rambles on and gives us some information, but that should be set out in writing, so people understand. And the Hon. Minister for Housing—there, shrugging her shoulders, of course. But that's the point. She should know. It's her department; it's her responsibility; it is her political
1330 responsibility. She may say *"No, no"* and repeat the point, but it doesn't make the argument any better.

The Hon. Chief Minister seeks to embarrass us about our stewardship of finances when we were in Office and also makes a reference in that context to the LNG plant. Again, which bit does the Hon. Chief Minister not understand—that he has a colleague in his Cabinet who was in our
1335 Party at the time when we exposed that fiasco and that controversy? Very much so—just before the 2015 General Election.

(Interjection: Where was your Leader?)

Does he not realise that the Hon. Mr Feetham was a Member of the GSD in the 2011 Election, where one of the main points of disagreement and tension that there was between them and us
1340 was a much-lauded Future Job Strategy, which the Hon. Chief Minister says has been the best thing since sliced bread—which is the cause, he says, of the reduction in the unemployment figures to 20-odd? And he said... *"The ringleaders in this House are mostly gone"*. He's actually right—mostly gone—because the ringleaders of that time are the Hon. Mr Feetham and me.

We were the ringleaders in relation to the criticism of the Future Job Strategy, absolutely, in
1345 2011. Absolutely, in 2011, we were the ringleaders against that policy. And there he is now, sitting in their Cabinet. Again—not personal. Not personal.

(Interjections...)

And then we had, just as a short aside, the most sickening, naff, almost comic reference by the Hon. Chief Minister to Brother Christian Duo of Unite the Union. I mean, for one moment I thought
1350 he was a Christian Brother when he made a reference to us. I mean, "Brother"? You really expect us... I know he's a member of Unite the Union. I know he's a member. But that was a bit too much.

(Interjection: ...that's how we greet each other...)

Many of my colleagues during the last election campaign were the subjects of ridicule—which was water off a duck's back—when they kept on saying that we were simply the Party of reviews:
1355 review this, review that. They did the same. They had umpteen references to reviews. And we've had it from the Hon. Chief Minister himself during the course of his intervention, when he said that, after—let's not forget—14 years in Office, and this particular demand has been made by Unite the Union in relation to the living wage, he is now going to be setting up a Living Wage Commission.

1360 And we had it in relation to the development plan, when, for goodness' sake, six and a half years on, we're still talking about drafts and consulting. They are woefully out of time, and they are simply subjecting these things to reviews when they have been in Office for so long—far too long. *(Laughter)*

So, what we have seen also is another very dangerous feature, where the Hon. Chief Minister
1365 is simply unable to distinguish the truth from what is not the truth. And then, in place of the truth, he creates another thing which he says is the truth—and it's not the truth, it's his creation. We're seeing a lot of that, time and time again. And while I focus this criticism on the Chief Minister, the malaise runs across the entire Government. We see it through and through, all the time.

Because, as the Hon. Mr Reyes mentioned in his intervention, the unilateral—without
1370 consultation—amendment of a policy in relation to the school leaver awards, which were going to leave out certain sectors of Gibraltarian society... And then the Hon. Chief Minister said: *"That's not what we said."*

(Interjection...)

That's not what he said – I did at the time – but, if needs be, we can have an argument about that.

The reality is—if the Hon. Chief Minister is uncomfortable with the point... Look, if the Hon. Chief Minister is uncomfortable with the point, Madam Speaker...

Madam Speaker: Just a minute, the Hon. Chief Ministers has raised a point of order.

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, it is a rule of this House that if you have an interest, you don't just declare it once—you have to declare it every time that you speak. The hon. Gentleman declared an interest in respect of that matter on one occasion; he is therefore bound to declare an interest again because, first of all, he's already told us he has an interest and now he's going to speak about the same subject. So, he has to declare the interest—not just say... You know, when I tell him that he needs to declare an interest, "*I declared it once*", he needs to... It's just a formal point, Madam Speaker, you know, because we all have to follow the rules. He just needs to say, "*I declare an interest*" and then carry on. Nobody's uncomfortable with the point; nobody's stopping him from speaking.

Hon. D J Bossino: Madam Speaker, the last time this was raised—when I asked a very bland question (the question, in fact, was my learned friend, the Opposition question, and I asked the supplementary)—he sought to embarrass me. He sought to embarrass me because he made me say that I had children in one particular school.

(Interjections...)

Because what interest am I expected to declare? I have an interest because I'm representing the taxpayer. He seeks to embarrass me, to say that I have children in one of those schools—and that's disgusting behaviour.

I don't think that I should have been stopped—which is contrary to parliamentary practice—during the course of my intervention on the budget address, to declare an interest, which actually I think is wrong.

Hon. Chief Minister: No, Madam Speaker, that cannot be wrong because the hon. Gentleman declared an interest last time. It cannot be disgusting that the hon. Gentleman sends his children to Prior Park—because many people send their children to Prior Park and there is nothing disgusting about it; it's very positive indeed. If he thinks it's disgusting, I'm surprised he sends his children to Prior Park.

Everybody who has raised an issue which has been susceptible to a point of order has been stopped during the course of their budget speeches. I've been stopped on many occasions; I've been stopped by the Speaker; I've been stopped by others on the other side who have wanted to raise points of order when I've been on this side and when I've been on that side. It's perfectly normal: if there is a point of order, a budget speech—or any speech—is interrupted.

The hon. Gentleman declared an interest last time. He confirmed he had an interest, and he declared it. That can be nothing disgusting. I welcome that people send their children to Prior Park, Madam Speaker. I don't understand why the hon. Gentleman thinks it's disgusting—and if he thinks it's disgusting, I don't understand why he sends his children to Prior Park.

Hon. D J Bossino: It's disgusting because he's hitting below the belt and bringing my family into this. And if he—

Madam Speaker: In any event...Now, I am calling order. The issue has been sufficiently aired. I think the point has been made. I'm going to ask the hon. Member to continue.

Hon. D J Bossino: I'm grateful, Madam Speaker. What he did—without consultation and without notice—was unilaterally take that decision, and it left many children who were about to

sit their A-level exams, and their parents—Gibraltarian taxpayers and Gibraltarian residents—with a doubt as to whether they were going to be receiving a grant. That is what happened.

They were subjected, as my hon. Friend Mr Reyes alluded to, to, in effect, scholarship apartheid. That's what they were subjected to. And this—if not a U-turn—was at least a messaging mismanagement, because his eye was off the ball. That caused a lot of angst and a lot of stress to those children and their families. There was even a reference to “freeloaders” in that context. We all arched an eyebrow as to what was going on. Had the Hon. Chief Minister lost his nugget, or what?

(Interjection...)

Thankfully—as far as we know, and I know that my friend Mr Reyes made the point rather cautiously—the matter is now resolved and sorted. But it created this sense of division in our society which was not nice, and not a nice place to be, when they are so very much proponents of inclusiveness and equality.

(Interjection: you are not...)

Equality—well, he says. But he's wrong in that as well.

(Interjection: ...homophobe...)

No, no, I'm not. Madam Speaker, the Hon. Chief Minister—I point you out.

Madam Speaker: The Hon. Chief Minister has made a comment from a sedentary position which is not appropriate. I'm going to ask the Hon. Chief Minister to withdraw that.

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, I of course accept your ruling. On Monday I shall be developing why I believe that those epithets apply to the hon. Gentleman.

Madam Speaker: Continue.

Hon. D J Bossino: Well, I wasn't going to go there. But now, given the indication that the Hon. Chief Minister has given, I will go there, and I will do that later in relation to my segment on the Minister for Equality.

The Hon. Chief Minister is simply capable of twisting facts—that is what he does—and we've just seen what he is all about. These are the features of Governments of the far right: populist posturing, and then he describes himself and his Government as socialist. It's socialist in name only. He behaves—*they* behave—like a far-right Government with populist messaging, an attitude, and an irresponsible way of doing politics.

I'm glad that in relation to the school leavers' award issue—whether it was bad messaging or a U-turn—we are so used to screeching U-turn after screeching U-turn by the hon. Gentlemen and Ladies opposite. We saw it in relation to the property tax legislation; we saw it in relation to the move from the Gibraltar College from the Cross of Sacrifice to now Europa Point; we saw it in relation to the sudden change of location of the police station, as the Hon. Mrs Ladislaus has mentioned; we saw it in relation to the Line Wall Road; we saw it in relation to the car levies.

This is simply arbitrary Government which doesn't know where it's going—it's going from disaster to disaster.

Let me move on, Madam Speaker, to the issue of the rental at 80a Queensway, which was rented by the Government from Bassadone Industrial World Limited. And before I move on, I want to explain to people—because people are very confused about this—when we raise this issue. This is not the snazzy building, the very nice building which Bassadone has for the car business; it's actually the building opposite that, further south, which is in a very bad way and in a bad state, which goes to the issue of value for money.

That is a property which was transferred to a private entity; it belonged to the Government, was transferred to a public entity, and the private entity then rented it back to the Government at a figure in excess of £1 million a year. But the Government also needs to spend many millions

of pounds in repairing it, in order to then put its Government Departments in there and release other properties where those Government Departments are currently housed.

1480 It's all a mess, and this is a purposive policy of the Government. And then they talk about value for money; and then they say that they are prudent in relation to our finances. What a joke! What a joke when you see these shenanigans going on. And our issue is an issue of value for money, because it simply doesn't make sense.

1485 We had a list recently—a very long list. It's incredible what the hon. Members opposite... and people may not realise, but it's there in public because I asked it, and Mr Clinton has asked it in the past: the rentals we pay. For example, I don't know what it's called now—the CSRO, the Civil Status and Registration Office—at Leanse Place: private entity leaseholder, for nine years, annual fee £217,000. Department of Education—44 Town Range and 10 Victualling Office Lane, which I imagine is St Mary's—so, for 150 years, for... wait for it... £1.135 million.

1490 And the property I've just mentioned, and there are others, it is a long list —80a Queensway, 21-year lease—£1.047 million annually *for now*, because it could be subject to increases in the future.

1495 This is not value for money. This really puts totally into question their ability to manage our finances. And this is their purposive policy. But the Hon. Chief Minister continues to twist things and to mislead and to use his Government majority—because that is what he did in relation to the Motion which emerged and arose as a result of our criticisms of 80a Queensway—where we ended up with a Motion, yes, an official Motion of this House, but passed by Government majority.

1500 This is a problem that we have in this place—in this Parliament. We need to sort this out. I'm glad that there is a Committee looking into this. We have long been proponents of enlarging the House so that people understand—in Gibraltar—the Government (*el Gobierno*) is the Gentlemen and Ladies sat there opposite. But actually, it is possible for the Government also to have Backbenchers, and for the Opposition also to Backbenchers, to vote down what the front bench may be proposing.

1505 That is not possible in this place, because they're going to be subjected to a thing called collective responsibility. So, if the Chief Minister says, "This is what you have to vote for," they all have to follow suit—or they need to resign. That is how this thing works. So, the sooner that we are able to deal with this built-in majority—which I think is unprecedented in many places—the better. Until then, we are unable to boast properly of a Parliamentary democracy.

1510 We are seeing it in the UK now, where Sir Keir Starmer has had to backtrack in relation to the Welfare Reform Bill, despite having a whopping majority in the House of Commons. He's had to change his position in relation to the Welfare Reform Bill. So, this is why he was able to pass that Motion and twist things and turn things around and say that we were the ones who were misleading, and not the hon. Gentlemen opposite.

1515 I have already dealt with the position in relation to the structural issues which we say arise from Sir Joe Bossano's policy on the National Economic Plan and in relation to the lack of transparency there is in relation to that.

1520 So, Madam Speaker, in relation to the Treaty, from a sedentary position, the Hon. Chief Minister was goading me, saying, "*Why haven't you...?*"—Who says I speak about everything, and "*why haven't you made a comment in relation to a Treaty?*" We are subjecting ourselves to a very... We discuss this at a Shadow Cabinet level. So what the Hon. Leader of the Opposition has said—he speaks on behalf of all of us.

1525 This is disciplined messaging, precisely because it is a sensitive issue—a very delicate issue. And you know, our position is very simple: what we have had is, in effect, a one-pager saying—this is what has been agreed. And importantly, it says "we have agreed that", in relation to the immigration and visa controls, "we have agreed that"; in relation to this fund that's being created, we have agreed; and on issues in relation to business, we have agreed. But we haven't seen the detail.

So all we are saying—it's not that we haven't welcomed it. Indeed, we have welcomed it, cautiously—because what we are saying is we need to see the Treaty text. What more do you

1530 expect from us? We are the largest party in this Parliament—we have eight Members. The configuration opposite is seven and two. We are the largest party in this House, and we know nothing about what's been negotiated.

(Interjections...)

We know nothing. We haven't been involved.

1535 Wouldn't it have been the right thing to do to have had us involved from the beginning? Then we might not have been in this position. But he keeps on almost wishing that we will not be in agreement with the hon. Gentlemen opposite. Look—that may not play to his playbook, but it is possible that we are. It is possible that we do say that we are in agreement with what the Gentlemen opposite and the Lady opposite have agreed. But he almost wants us to oppose it, presumably because then there's clear blue line between them and us in relation to something so

1540 important.

But what we won't do is act irresponsibly, as they did when Sir Peter Caruana came back in 2006 and brought the Cordoba Agreement, and they started to cherry-pick in relation to that as a political party. I know what they're going to be saying in response in relation to that—I know that. But the point had to be made: the Hon. Leader of my Party is acting very responsibly and, quite

1545 frankly, statesman-like in relation to the position he has adopted.

Until we have the detail in front of us, we will not pass proper judgement. But, as I said before, we have already welcomed it—albeit a cautious welcome. We are not going to be irresponsible as they have been. So, they may be unpleasantly surprised, but we will scrutinise every word once it comes through. Because the Hon. Chief Minister needs to understand that we need to—because

1550 of all the things I've said up until now—fact-check everything that he says and that they say.

This is the hon. Gentleman who said we are 0.01% away from a deal. I mean—let me look at my notes—was it *“closer than ever”*? *“Kissing distance”*? And we have it etched in our psyche: *“excruciatingly close”*. That's the next one—all of this in the last two years.

Of course—well, I'll get to the bit now—this is all said during the course of the General Election

1555 campaign. That is what he said. I know that was more recent, yes. Even the Hon. Mrs Arias Vazquez, at the GFA dinner, said; *“we are in the final throes of Treaty negotiations”*. Where's the Treaty? We haven't seen it. We've seen a one-page press release, but we haven't seen the Treaty—which promises to be very long, and I wouldn't be surprised if it gives us just a few hours to read it before we can reach a conclusion in relation to it.

1560 But as it is already, aren't we being subjected to fancy footwork by the Hon. Chief Minister? We had it in the session we had last week when, in relation to Frontex, he said: *“No, Frontex? I never said there was going to be. The issue with Frontex was at the port—but that's resolved.”* This is when he was ad-libbing in response to the Leader of the Opposition's supplementary questions: *“No, no, no, it's not an issue, Frontex, because we've done away with the ferry—no Frontex.”*

1565

And then—when he may have forgotten, because he may be a bit jaded, in that role for so long—there was a notice of questions. There was another question in the Order Paper, specifically about Frontex, where he would have had the prepared response. Of course, what he then does is get up and say: *“Well, I've already answered the question”* not wishing to read out the prepared

1570 answer—which was totally different to the answer he gave in relation to the port. All of a sudden, it's an issue of computers. And all of a sudden, Frontex was at the airport—which is what we all knew was the case in the New Year's Eve Agreement.

Frontex was going to be at the airport. And it may be that the solution is something that we are willing, when we see the detail, to support—maybe something that we're willing to support.

1575 But what I'm saying is that we cannot believe what the hon. Gentleman says. So, we have to be on inquiry about everything he says—and that is why we particularly need to see, because it's *him*, the actual Treaty text.

But for him detail—you know—doesn't matter. Why let detail get in the way of a good story or, indeed, electoral success? Where is the manure in the show? Where is the manure in the

1580 show? Because now there's so much hyperbole around this—so much positive messaging around this—that there is no manure. We can't even smell the manure.

He said—*"it's as if this was a fork in the road towards thriving and greater growth."* And I told the hon. Gentleman from a sedentary position when he was giving his address that I would be quoting scripture, and I do so now—it comes from Matthew. He says—well, the Lord Jesus Christ said: *"Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will recognise them by their fruits."*

1590 So, we will judge them—we will judge them—by the fruits of what they put on the table. Whether he is a ravenous wolf or actually a sheep. Would the now deceased Holy Father have been happy? He actually seeks the support, a year or two after he had the audience with Pope Francis, once he had died—so the gentleman couldn't give evidence in relation to that—that he was keen that Gibraltar enter into a deal with the EU so that there is a very fluid frontier.

For goodness' sake—had the Holy Father been alive now, I wouldn't be surprised if he would have been part of this posse of people supporting him on this. Maybe we would have called him up and asked him to write a letter in the *Chronicle*.

1595 I move on to the Deputy Chief Minister's contribution, and I must say that the speech of the winner of the last General Election—the top biller—was very good. And I know that the Hon. Chief Minister is an emotional man. He's capable of things which are very wrong, but he's also capable of a few good things—and that endears me towards him. I know it doesn't apply to everybody, but then he got emotional in respect of the sacrifice that they had endured as a result of all the things that they had to go through in order to reach the position that they have reached.

1600 And actually, in relation to the Hon. Deputy Chief Minister, we had more realism—we did have more realism—when he said, and I quote: *"It will not be perfect."* A bit of the manure was there—*"It will not be perfect."* The only issue I have with him is that he didn't describe what the imperfections were. There was no allusion to what the imperfections were—so where is the manure? He only alighted on the positives and talked about the Treaty being beneficial to Gibraltar, and that the access/exit arrangements would provide a solid guarantee of security, which he knows is a very big issue for our people.

1605 And he is absolutely right—and he has always been absolutely right, the Deputy Chief Minister—in his honest appraisal and analysis of what the proper fork in the road was facing us. Which is—and I make the point—that the current status quo would not have been available. It would have been a lot worse. Because people can think, because you're used to, us Gibraltarian residents, that you cross over to La Línea with the ID card and it doesn't get stamped. It would have been what the blue ID card holders have been going through—plus queues and queues. That is the abyss that we were facing, and I commend the Hon. Deputy Chief Minister for having made that point.

1615 And I know he has made it in the past, and I'm glad that he has repeated it, because it is important for people—when they look at this and have an opinion on this—that that is what we were facing. That is not to say that we will not have a view in relation to what they bring back, but he can be assured that this is something that we, as a responsible political Party, will be considering when we consider the detail of the Treaty.

1620 The Hon. Deputy Chief Minister doesn't make a pitch at the leadership, but he does make a pitch for the next General Election. I know—because he is very conscious not just of his history but of the future—and he makes a pitch saying, which is going to be no doubt one of their selling features in two years' time, or perhaps earlier if there's a snap election, the networks and relationships which have been built by him and the Hon. Chief Minister over the years in relation to this. But had we worked as a team, maybe we would have had that availability and access to those networks and those connections. That would also have been possible.

1625 And if we'd ever had more continuity—that doesn't mean that there may not be a change of Government—and we can rely on the brilliant support of Mr D'Amato and company. But they need to appreciate that they are not indispensable.

1630

Now I move on to the second or third contribution from the Government, which is that from Mr Cortes, who—as I’ve already said—has very clear and obvious aspirations for the top job. But I need to break something to him: I’m not sure if he realised, when he stood up, that more than—what?—70–80% of the Government weren’t here. Same thing happened last year. Sir Joe hasn’t been here at all. But not even the Deputy Chief Minister, who normally has the courtesy—I know he takes this seriously—of listening to all contributors. Not even with him was he able to stay; he left – he had to have attended important business.

But the Hon. Minister was, I think, left with two Ministers—one of them was the Hon. Minister for Housing, and I can’t remember if it was the Hon. Minister for Culture. That was it. And I think that’s an indication that he was thinking about going and putting his name—his hat—in the ring. He will have a difficult mountain to climb. But then he uses language at the beginning of his contribution which I think ill befits him—I don’t think it’s in his nature—when he says: *“The Chief Minister will go to town on the things that were said by the Hon. Leader of the Opposition,”* and that the Chief Minister had *“put me firmly in my place”*.

I don’t feel *“put in my place”* at all—but no doubt that will be corrected by the Hon. Chief Minister in his reply. But I don’t think it’s language that is really him, deep down. I don’t think he’s like that.

But, as is the norm for the Hon. Minister, the ego gets the better of him, and he actually said—I think Mr Origo commented—that he said, *“I don’t believe it, he’s looking at his notes and we’ve got so many achievements that I forget some of them.”* I don’t believe it—and he actually believes that. The reason why he forgets some of them is because he has few achievements. That’s the reason why he forgets some of them. *Sera possible* indeed, indeed. *“We are a victim of our own success.”*

And we—the Hon. Gentleman, as I told you before—doesn’t have a grandmother, and he needs to put on the badge—he needs to be put on a badge—because that is his ego oozing out of his every pore. Because there’s always *I, I* and *me, me*.

Mr Cortes refers to our leadership elections in his contribution. I mean, that’s nothing to be ashamed about. We’ve had three contested leadership elections. The fact is that, in a small place like Gibraltar, when you’re dealing with a small team—as we are, nine, ten, and in this case it was bigger than it was before—and we have a smallish executive and members, it can be very tough. It can be very divisive. And it can, for a while—the Leader of the Opposition and myself are not like that by nature – you can maybe even lose acquaintances and friends—because you think you have support and then maybe you don’t have it, or you feel betrayed. It’s very tough. But here we are.

Here we are, together. Here we are, united. They can’t say the same thing, because they have had—almost like the USSR, a communist party—appointments. They transitioned from Sir Joe Bossano, after 150 million years, from the foundation of the party in 1976, to April 2011, just to be precise, when the Hon. the Chief Minister is anointed, and the Members of the Party—presumably with a show of hands, very, very socialist, right—acclaimed the Hon. Deputy Chief Minister, as a young 39-year-old, to be Leader and then Chief Minister a few months later.

But this is a sign of a mature party. I hope, when it comes to them, they are also able to do it successfully, because I believe that the GSLP, the Liberals and the GSD should be here for a very long time. It does give a sense of discipline, and it does give the choice to the electorate. The Hon. Minister for Economic Development, Sir Joe Bossano—who is not here—used to say that the GSD was simply a creation to get rid of him, which it did successfully on 16th May 1996, to boot him out of power.

But it’s more than that. It’s more than that. It’s very obvious. Now, we have a new generation coming through, and I’m very hopeful—and a further generation of teenagers in GSD Future, very ably managed by my learned hon. Friend, Mr Origo, coming through. I’m hopeful for the future of this party, whether I am here or not. *(Interjections...)*

So, can we challenge another notion of the Hon. Minister Cortes, of his own creation, which is, as I said before, that the site’s improvements are going to be paid, or will not be paid, by the

taxpayer. I have said already that that increase will mean that there will be less money in the Exchequer and, secondly, that we may have a loss of business. I'm saying that we will... as he said—he said of me that I had said that it was *“going to be, would result in a veritable decrease”*. I didn't say that. I have concerns. I have concern that it may result—and so he needs to be very careful in relation to that.

But in all his words—and there were many—there were gaping holes; there were things that he didn't mention. I've already alluded to the school leavers' issue, which he didn't mention, and he was directly the Minister responsible and therefore the Minister who should have been handling this and failed to handle it properly.

But also, he refers to the Road to the Lines project—that project which has gone from the Deputy Chief Minister to the Hon. Minister for Housing and now to Sir Joe Bossano. But in that context, he makes no mention and offers no apology for the bolting of our mediaeval castle, contrary to the law. A law which I think he introduced—and he didn't even know about it.

And then, in a rather—below-the-belt way—starts, in one of his answers, to suggest that I am going to be investigated. I mean, that's incredible. But that's the sinister side—if that is true—of the Hon. Minister opposite. I wouldn't be surprised if he even sought legal advice in relation to that. I wouldn't be surprised—because that's where they are. They target people personally. I'm an Opposition Member. I expose it. He didn't know, and he is the Minister responsible for it. Shame on him. Shame on him for even suggesting that I should be the subject of criminal proceedings in relation to that.

But he should have apologised. He was politically responsible for it.

And then he refers to the—mouth-watering, he says—project that is the refurbishment of the Moorish Castle. Why does it require—after Knightsfield Holdings, which is responsible for the castle and now, as a result of the extension of the contract, is also responsible for the tower—why does it require further refurbishment? When it's been receiving one point something million pounds for X number of years, why was the Castle left in the state that it was left, and why does it now require more money through Fortress Attractions Ltd?

That was also left out of his contribution. And I've already cleared up the other fallacy—that we were the ones who continued the arrangements. I think I have already set out very clearly that we stopped it when we created the Gibraltar Culture and Heritage Agency.

The Chief Minister wants us to apologise. The Hon. Minister Cortes wants us to *embrace the work of these Gibraltarians*. Once again—nothing to do with these individuals. I have no issue with them. They may have an issue with me because they don't like me raising these issues, so they may not say hello to me. But look—this is Gibraltar. But that won't stop me. Whilst this charade, whilst this travesty, whilst this embarrassment carries on, I will continue to expose this.

Because it's not right that this company should be receiving so much money. It's not their responsibility—they're the beneficiaries of it. They're laughing. It's *they* who are politically responsible in terms of dishing out the dosh and the cash.

And then the Hon. Minister says that he's working closely with Mrs Arias Vazquez on the Old Town design guide in relation to the development plan. But where is that plan, for goodness' sake? As I said before, there won't be any more space to build on when the plan comes to fruition.

And then we've had this from the hon. Member opposite and also from the Hon. Mrs Arias Vazquez—sorry, Arias Vazquez—where he says... so he got the silver prize of the Budget Busters Award. So—yes, sorry—silver medal, the Hon. Mr Cortes. *I got the silver medal because of a child in his education portfolio presumably needs the money and for our children he will spend it*. You know, they pull at our heartstrings—Mrs Arias Vazquez does the same thing in relation to health.

But they all miss the point. That may be the case—and we have no difficulty with that—but it's their responsibility to budget properly for this, and not to massage the figures to make them look better each year. That is the point that we're making. That is the point that Mr Clinton makes. That is the point that the Hon. Mr Clinton and the Hon. Leader of the Opposition make.

We continue to be exercising in relationship to this issue, because they do it every time: they project expenditure, then you have a surplus which is bigger than it should be—it should probably

1735 be a deficit. That is our point—although, on this occasion, they were saved by the Hon. Mr Feetham to some extent—because we say that there’s been massaging of the figures.

And then he too also joins in the high-pressure promotion of the deal when he, rather disparagingly, says he was a *20-odd-year-old*—and if I remember those days, I was much younger than he, but I do remember that day—and I also remember the concerns that there were that
1740 Gibraltar would be a less safe place, and all the rest of it, and there were concerns about *osmosis*. Actually, the person who used that word in that context—*osmosis*—was the Hon. Sir Joe Bossano. He’s the one who was talking about that. And there will be concerns in relation to that as well into the future—but this is not for this debate.

So, the Hon. Sir Joe Bossano—moving on—also had an element of realism. There was scant
1745 detail in relation to the Treaty, but there was also an element of realism. And actually—and this runs counter—there were two things he said which contradicted what the Hon. Minister for Tourism said. He said that there would be more people perhaps staying in hotels in La Línea. So, where will our occupancy levels, in terms of hotel occupancy, be once the Treaty comes into place? But at least it’s an honest appraisal and assessment of that position—and he said that.

1750 But not a reference was made to that by the Hon. Minister Santos. The Hon. Sir Joe Bossano was also ultra-cautious in relation to the figures of expenditure which are in the book for this year, because he doesn’t know—he’s unable to predict—what the effects of the Treaty would be.

It’s very odd and strange that the Hon. Mr Feetham was not here to listen to the Hon. Sir Joe Bossano. I mean—has there been a rift? Because, as we understand it, Sir Joe Bossano is his main
1755 promoter in the leadership contest. But yet, Mr Feetham was... oh—that is—he was unwell. Yes, he says, rightly so from his sedentary position, that he was unwell. And he has explained that to me as we were walking up the stairs—yes, I’d forgotten about that. So, I’m glad that there’s no longer any rift, as I had suspected, between them, and that Sir Joe Bossano continues to be his main promoter for the leadership of the Party.

1760 One remarkable thing that the Hon. Sir Joe Bossano said in the course of his intervention was that *so long as the Savings Bank was under his hands, it would be safe*. It wasn’t the Government. *It wasn’t the Government, it was “my hands”*.

And it is true, as I said before to the Hon. Minister for Housing—when we’ve asked previous Ministers for Housing about projects, for example in relation to pensioner flats in Laguna, and Sir
1765 Joe wasn’t here—they all drew a blank. Not even the Minister for Finance, i.e. the Chief Minister, was able to answer a question. *“No, that’s being handled by Sir Joe Bossano”*. And that is the difficulty we have—because there’s no transparency, because there is no proper way for us to look at the books. We don’t know where this is going.

1770 But the worst thing is—what do we do without Sir Joe? What do we do without Sir Joe when he’s no longer around? Because he said it’s personal to him, and he’s the one who deals with it.

But even then, again, alluded to by both colleagues during the course of their contributions, we are seeing it in relation to the fiasco—it’s increasingly looking like a fiasco—in relation to the Rooke Residential Home, where we are spending—well, the Savings Bank is spending—£35 million, or £38 million. I mean, where is this going? And years after the expected completion date,
1775 we don’t even have a certificate of fitness, for goodness’ sake.

And this is big stuff—and this is in respect of one project. Goodness knows what’s happening to other projects. But again, we cannot have a view because we don’t have all the details.

And then he makes various admissions. When he talks of his manifesto commitments—Sir Joe has changed. Sir Joe had changed before. GSLP manifesto commitments were cast-iron
1780 guarantees. Those things would be done—that’s when they were in Opposition. And now, there are things that *should* be done. And I’m not surprised, because there is a litany of breaches of electoral promises. No longer cast-iron guarantees: no longer the contractual obligations which they used to say—I think in the New Deal manifesto of 2003—where *we will sign a contract with the people with these promises*.

1785 Of course they didn’t get elected, but that’s gone by the wayside given their history and their track record. And he made another admission when he did the analysis of overspends, when he

refused to express a view whether they were good, bad, or neutral. We only see overspends in these departments, as was rightly pointed out by my hon. Friend, Mr Clinton. But he was not able, or didn't wish to—because, obviously, it would be politically embarrassing to the rest of them—say whether this was good, bad, or neutral. But, given his non-explanation, we think he probably thinks it's very bad. It's very bad.

And, dealing with the Hon. Mr Feetham, he says that, no, this was an exception in the sense that it was not expected—that, you know, this was not in the... He was correcting what the Hon. the Leader of the Opposition had said, but he said this was part of his national tax strategy. *It is a well-designed strategy*—but if it was so well designed and so specific, why didn't they predict these estimates at the time? Why didn't they do so? Why wasn't this in the books at the time?

So—and then he talks about reduced tax. Mr Sacarello mentioned to me, when he said that at the time—reduced tax—because you'd increased it before. You'd increased it before; there was an increase in PAYE. So, you know, these things are a nonsense, with the greatest respect to him.

And then he talked about—of course, this is all part of his leadership campaign—and I will just read a few things: *the largest intake, a historic milestone, a record-breaking figure, the big, beautiful chart à la Trump, unprecedented achievements, sustainable success*—all part of his ongoing leadership campaign. I'm sure that he was speaking not to the electorate, but to GSLP Members when he said all of those things.

But then he says, and marks, in effect, a word of caution. A word of caution, yes—which is possibly indicative of future tax rises. And that is where he may falter a bit, when he says, *"tax revenues are not a bottomless pit. We need to make tough decisions. Tax revenues do not grow on trees"*. Where is he leading to when he's making these comments? We think that he is potentially leading to tax rises in the future.

And then he says that these things are *"not permanent"*. This is an admission of what the Leader of the Opposition and Mr Clinton have been saying: that this is a one-off. In that sense, it is exceptional—as the Hon. the Chief Minister said. This is a blip, which is unlikely to happen again. So, he needs to be careful about what he says and not get carried away.

And finally, in relation to the Hon. Minister Feetham, when he says—just briefly, in relation to the Treaty—*"it's a highly important step forward. A highly important step forward"*. And then he says, in the context of the Moneyval inspection which is coming in 2027, what possible effects there could be in relation to the entry into the Treaty arrangements in respect of that. And all I do, from this side of the House, is urge him—and I know that he will—that he treats that with the greatest of care to make sure that Gibraltar does pass with flying colours.

In relation to the Hon. Minister for Health, I'm not sure what the hon. Lady is doing when she keeps on mentioning these things like *mansplaining, misogynists*—that, you know, she's described as *crazy* when she's passionate, she has *fire in the belly*. I have the greatest of respect for her—and I'm sure that applies to all of us—as far as that is concerned. She needs to relax.

As far as the Opposition is concerned, people out there—outside this House—may be saying these things about her, but that's public opinion; she cannot control that. The hon. Lady needs to have a thicker skin. But, of course, what she cannot then do is come here, put all of that to one side, and then seek to engage in political point-scoring—which is what she did. She was a mudslinger *par excellence* during the course of her intervention, which, quite frankly, in that respect, was disappointing, because I thought she might have brought in a different style—to the point that her direct shadow has had to change her tack. A person who has said expressly that she wants to be co-operative—and still is—but has had to react to what the Hon. Minister is saying, and her attitude, in defence of her constituents.

And she says—and sets the stage—that she is responsible for *50% of Government portfolios*. That is showing, again, part of her leadership campaign: that she can be Chief Minister. She already runs half of the Government was basically the messaging when she made that comment. And that brought immediate support from the Hon. Chief Minister when he banged on the table and encouraged her by shouting, *"hear, hear"*. Again, another feature of how obvious it is what they are doing.

1840 So, Madam Speaker, in relation to defending the excess in expenditure—gold medallist—she misses the point, which is the point I made in relation to the Hon. Mr Cortes: that they are not honest estimates. When she says, “*we need to be excused; well, if we have to spend, we will*”, the hon. Lady says, “*we are spending more because we are doing more*”. I mean, that’s an obvious point, but that doesn’t present her with an excuse; it doesn’t present her in relation to the port, for which she’s also responsible—one of her 50% responsibilities. They’ve also breached the estimate.

1845 The point here is budgetary discipline. Which bit of that does the hon. Lady not understand? And then—and I’m sure it’s a slip of the tongue—she says that “*the decisions that we make as Minister*”. I mean, why is the hon. Lady using the word *we*? Was the hon. Lady being Thatcherite in her approach? Because, certainly, her berating—unsuccessfully, I would say—of my friend was very much Thatcher-esque; very aggressive of her, if I may say so, and it behoves her.

1850 And then we had that tactical point, which I think, in the end, worked well: when the hon. Lady, after two and a half hours—or whatever it was—of her contribution, finishes at 1.33, and the expectation on our side of the House was that we were going to break for lunch. But, no—they went straight to Mrs Ladislaus, thinking what? That they were going to catch her off guard? Was that the intention? Well, she was totally prepared. There was complete confidence in her. So, quite frankly, it is...

1855 And then they have the gall to talk about family-friendly hours. When I make the point—as I did in the last intervention last year—when I’m asked, *when are you coming out?*, we know when we come in, we know when we start, but nobody on this side of the House—at least—knows when we’re going to finish or when we are going to adjourn to. We have absolutely no control—but they do. They can arrange their diaries. They can go to sports days for their kids. They can do all of those things—or attend to professional issues. Coincidentally, it happened on this occasion. But we can’t. We have no notice in relation to this.

1860 So we finish at 1.30, and off she goes. She had to start; there was no lunch break for a gathering of thoughts, at least—but she did brilliantly, quite frankly.

1865 And then they want to encourage more women into politics. I’m not sure they’re going in the right direction in relation to that. I certainly want to encourage more women in this place. I mean, even in small jurisdictions, Mr Sacarello was telling me there were crèches in the Channel Islands. Here, we don’t even know when we’re going to finish. So how can parents attend to childcare needs?

1870 She also then says that “*we criticise the procurement rules*”. We’re not criticising the procurement rules—we do as well—but we’re not the only ones. It is also the Principal Auditor. The Principal Auditor, in the reports that we’ve seen up until now, does criticise the procurement rules.

1875 And then she says—this issue about the domiciliary care, which I know she’s working hard on—that “*I’m not doing this for photo opportunities*”. I mean, with the greatest of respect, she needs to pull the other one in relation to that, because she’s one of the main culprits.

1880 And in relation—may I tell her—in relation to LifeCome Care, she says that “*this is not a political decision; it was a necessary one*”. I mean, she is a politician. She is sat there—indeed, if she had been sat here, she would also have been a politician—but she is there with governmental, ministerial responsibility. Ergo, every single decision she makes is a political decision, for which she is politically responsible.

1885 And in relation to LifeCome Care—when my friend Mrs Sanchez was insisting, for a very long period of time, that things weren’t going right, and the Minister was defending the position—it’s highly controversial that she has had to admit that it wasn’t right, and had to take the very important decision of ending that particular contractual relationship because she changed her mind. And that’s fine. But in the UK—or other places—she would have been the subject of immense and intense political and media pressure and probably have had to resign.

1890 Because they entered, in effect, into damage-limitation mode—and there’s no question about that. And Mrs Sanchez did a wonderful and great job in exposing all of that.

And then, rather insultingly, she refers to the Leader of the Opposition's contribution as *droning on*—that he had *no personality*. I mean, talk about following the instruction booklet of the Hon. the Chief Minister. The belt is there; hit below it. That's not fair. That's not fair. She insults the man politically.

1895 And then he says—well, he comments from the sidelines—but *let us sort it out. Oh, we're happy to have a contest. Let's have a contest. Let's have an early election. No, let's have an election.* If she has so much angst created by this, then let's have an election. Let's see who can be on that side, and they can be on this side. That can happen. That can happen!

1900 So, in relation to the Port, I have already said that she was again unable to anticipate the expenses.

Now, in relation to Town Planning, I commend her—I commend the Hon. Minister, Mrs Arias Vasquez—for trying to politically spin her way out of the hole that she's currently in. In relation to the Development Plan, she talks about many things around it. The reality is, as I said before, it is now six years out of date, and the Hon. Minister only refers to the 1991 Plan, as if only the GSLP
1905 Plan is the one that's valid. There was one in 2009, which is the plan now—our plan, the GSD Plan—which is the one that is now out of date. And she says, *outcome over optics*. I'm not sure I fully accept that from the hon. Lady.

In relation to the Hon. Minister Santos, I must congratulate him for the Disney-like contribution that he made—most of his descriptions had moments where we were in a show. But
1910 he doesn't beat Mr Clinton in respect of the *game show prize list* that he was able to produce. Let me tell the Hon. Minister that I agree with his comment in relation to the Lived Experience Council that he's set up: that Gibraltar is all about its people, and he makes a lot of emphasis on that. I mean, that is him—that is Mr Santos and the community—and I think it is a laudable aim, one that needs to continue. We can't sit on our laurels in relation to that.

1915 When I thought about this—because I didn't want this to be about gender issues or identity politics—one needs to move away from that, I think. But I do make a comment and intervention in relation to this because of the comments we've had from the Chief Minister. He has already promised that he will make a case as to why I am *homophobic* or *misogynist*, which are the words he used, and which, quite frankly, in my view, are unparliamentary. And I think it's simply—if I can
1920 say it as calmly as I possibly can—totally and utterly untrue, and totally and utterly despicable, actually, for the Hon. Chief Minister to suggest that he's going to be making a case in relation to that.

In relation to the hon. Member that I'm addressing, in respect of his contribution, when he talked about *cancel culture* and not moving beyond the bonds of respect, and that there has to be
1925 respect for all, I could not agree with him more. That is why I wasn't even going to go there—because then it creates issues that, quite frankly, are not me, although some people paint a picture of me because I've adopted some issues of principle due to my religious beliefs. That doesn't mean I don't respect other people who have a different point of view.

And that is where I want to come from: that we can have a debate; that I'm open-minded; and that I have very good gay and lesbian friends—no issue with that. I was brought up with three
1930 women—my three sisters and my mother. My sisters wouldn't be very happy with the description that the Hon. Chief Minister has made of me, for example, in the misogynist aspect of things.

So, let me just say that I agree with the Hon. Mr Santos that we need to have an understanding and a debate born from a premise of respect—and that's all I want to say in relation
1935 to that. And I hope that the Chief Minister will reconsider what he was planning to say about me, because these things are used for political gain. Let's make no mistake: the denigration and creating of an image—particularly of me, and people who may think like me or have certain beliefs—are, as far as he is concerned, used for his political advantage.

What I would say is that, in relation to Gibraltar, when he says that Gibraltar has a growing
1940 job market, actually it's contrary to what Sir Joe was saying. Sir Joe would say that the job market is going to be shrinking because of AI and all the rest of it. So again, there's another point of dissonance between Mr Santos and Sir Joe Bossano.

He also attributes to himself the low unemployment figures. I understand why he attributes that to himself, but the Hon. Chief Minister attributed it to the *Future Job Strategy*—which, as far as I’m concerned, doesn’t exist anymore. I think the Hon. Mr Santos, as the Minister responsible for employment, has introduced new policies, with respect to which I think we don’t have any major issues.

And then again, if I may say, with the greatest of respect, I think that the treatment of my friend, Mr Origo—when he made his contribution – before he made his contribution—when he says that he makes *uninformed and unresearched questions*, I think, with the greatest respect, that was patronising, and a negative form of politics. Again, I don’t think that is Mr Santos, and I think I would add that this is both inaccurate and unnecessary.

In respect of his culture responsibilities, there was again a gaping hole—as I think Mr Reyes pointed out during the course of his contribution—in that there was no mention of the new theatre. I mean, you’re the Minister for Culture, and there was absolutely no mention made of the new theatre.

And then he very—well, I was going to say *ably*; I’m not sure he did it that well, to be honest—when he made an admission in respect of the 10% decline in people coming through the airport, gave no response and no explanation as to how that has transpired or what he’s going to be doing to reverse that decline. Because I’ve had people who have businesses in the airport who have concerns, because they’re seeing a reduced footfall.

Again, another gaping hole in his presentation was when he was talking about his airport/air terminal responsibilities. We didn’t hear one word of thanks—because we built that terminal—which was much maligned by the Hon. Chief Minister in particular when he was on this side of the House. Much maligned, when he kept on repeating this point, this *tatty Chronicle* article that he had from the time when it was. So, you know, that’s thanks to our initiative and to Sir Peter Caruana’s initiative.

So again, I thought it was a very lazy, if I may say so, comment that he made in relation to EasyJet Holidays coming to Gibraltar, because he says that *they are up—not just up—up significantly from last year*. He says, *a rising star, rising star*. But he gives no evidence—no statistics—to substantiate what he said.

And income from tourist sites on the Rock—no mention made of the Tourism Strategy. He didn’t delve into any detail, and here we are waiting with bated breath. Certainly, the first time I heard that there was a tourism strategy... *(Interjections)* No, no, no—well, it didn’t say... So, Mr Bossino decided—I’m sure it’s a very good strategy—but the reality is, the first I heard of it wasn’t during the course of our TV debate. Yes—that TV debate—which you were all very nervous about me attending instead of Mr Origo.

But yet, they themselves have a division between the environment and tourism—because, quite frankly, it is the Hon. Minister for Tourism who should be responsible for all the sites in the Upper Rock, and not the Minister for the Environment. If we’re in Government, it’s something we need to look at; it doesn’t make sense whatsoever.

Now, if I go instead of Mr Origo, it’s highly controversial, and they almost didn’t want to debate me. *(Interjections)* That’s the point—we are the ones who decide who we send. No mention made, Madam Speaker—no mention made—of any new hotels.

In respect of the Hon. Minister for Civil Contingencies and Sport, Mr Bruzon, may I simply welcome his contribution. He simply gave a state of his departments; he gave an account, neutrally put. There were no snide party-political remarks—which they have all, without exception, been responsible for. Nothing from that department, if I may say—and I commend him for that.

I certainly welcome that, because they are the ones who provoke us. *(Interjections)* And he says that he doesn’t fit into boxes—and he’s absolutely right. I think he has shown that, in a very reasonable way, in his contribution to this debate.

The only point that I would make—two points. One is that no mention was made of the fire station, at least as to when it’s going to be completed. He knows that we’ve asked questions in

1995 relation to that very recently in this House, and again, we wait with bated breath as to when he's going to be announcing the new fire station. That point was made by Mrs Ladislaus in her contribution—she shadows that area as well.

The second thing I was going to say is: can I encourage him to do one thing? Come over to us. (*banging on desks*) We could go back to the traditional Government of Gibraltar and we would have ten. Mr Cortes may have a greater chance of being Leader of the GSD than he is of being the Leader of the GSLP—so, you know, let's look; maybe we can have a drink later at the wine festival.

And I'm coming close to my conclusion, because I need to deal with the Hon. Minister for Housing. It was a very forceful, teacher-esque contribution—waving of the fingers, berating me, describing the way I put my questions; gesticulation, I think. I actually felt a slight fear at some of the things. I don't think the hon. Lady—I don't think she ever did teach me.

It's a very forceful contribution. She did say that she would scrap the housing waiting list—and I must say that it's going to take a while at this rate. We are nearly two years into the term, and there's no indication whatsoever that that housing waiting list is going to come to zero.

Although there's clearly a distinction between her stated position and that of the Chief Minister—who says it's not quite zero—there was no word of that. The most she's able to say is that—was it the building of 17 flats in respect of the Rent and Repair? She says it's *a resounding success... it has had an overwhelming result*. She's prone to that type of thing, but it is actually flimsy; it is baseless; it is hollow.

Because, actually—and she says, *no, no eye-rolling*—but I'm starting to roll my eyes already, because our position is very simple. It's not that we are against it; what we're saying is that the jury is out. All that they have been able to do with this project—which is probably one by Sir Joe Bossano, not her—is to build 17 flats. It is to convert 17 flats and give those to people on the housing waiting list.

In any event, 17 is not enough to deliver her policy and her stated electoral promise to deal with the housing waiting list. (*Interjections*) No wonder she did very well in Mr Clinton's awards... (*Interjection: I was number 7*) No, I didn't say it did badly—*did badly*, which means that she did well, yes. Sorry—I meant *well* in the sense that the hon. Lady has not built a flat.

She hasn't built a flat. She may not like it, but she has to take the criticism—she's a politician; she's been wanting to be a politician for a long time. She was never selected by her executive of the party to be a Minister, but on this occasion she was, and she managed to get in.

But the reality is—as I said before—here we have a Minister for Housing who says that a reclamation project is on the horizon. For goodness' sake—at least this is another reclamation project, because certainly the Westview Park one was already announced by the Chief Minister, and she is certainly not responsible for it.

It's clear she didn't mention it at all—unless the Horizon Reclamation Project is this one. It's already been announced and delayed, because not a grain of sand has been deposited outside of Westview Park, and they are meant to be handing keys by January 2028, I think it is, or possibly July. Those were the timelines—not set by her but set by the Hon. Chief Minister during the course of a *GBC Today* programme interview. That is what he said—to whet people's appetites, no doubt. No way, as far as we can see, is that going to happen.

And the Hon. Minister also makes no mention of the 5% increase for rent. No mention. She needs to calm down. All I'm saying is that she makes no mention because these things are uncomfortable for her. She knows this is unpopular for her, so what she says is that Varyl Begg Estate is now being painted with *vibrant colours*.

The meticulous attention to detail—so much so that they painted one block with one colour. That's not detail—that's a fundamental flaw. It was red, yellow, and red. Was it an indication of things to come? They had to spend more money, probably. I know she said they didn't give taxpayers' money—that's what she said. But the reality is, it was a massive faux pas. She needs to admit that. But none of that from her, because she's full of praise for the things that she does herself.

You know? So, you know, Bridge House—we found a solution, we found a solution—and then she does it. The Hon. Minister can relax as far as we are concerned. She made a rather politically incorrect remark about it, which was quite funny, but she can relax. And she says, *I need to apologise*. She can relax as far as we are concerned.

2050 But, yes, I am very relaxed—very relaxed—but the Hon. Minister says that she has found a solution after 14 years in office. For goodness' sake—14 years! This is not their second term; this is not even their third term—they are in their fourth term. And now she says that they have found a solution, but she is not able to give details. Not able to give details; she certainly wasn't able to give details about the funding, and she has said, *we will come up with a criteria later on*.

2055 Another admission: when she lists the home ownership projects which were promised in the 2015 General Election, she would have been better advised by her officials—or indeed by the Leader of her Party—probably not to have gone there. Because there are many people who have been waiting for a very long time, living in super-uncomfortable conditions, unable to progress their family lives because they are still waiting to move in.

2060 And they may have had their reasons—but let's not beat around the bush. There has been a fundamental breach—a fundamental breach—of the cast-iron, what used to be called *cast-iron* electoral promises. A completely fundamental breach. And yet, she goes into the hole and makes a reference to it. But there's one project she doesn't make a reference to... One project she does make a reference to—I didn't hear it.

2065 Chatham—she went to see it; they did that ceremony with a flag, which I know is done. Bob Peliza Phase 1—what about the other one? Bob Peliza Phase 1—she gives her completion date. I've got to check whether that is against the information that I received from the Deputy Chief Minister, and whether that has also moved. But Bob Peliza Phase 2—still nothing. People waiting—people, I am told, who may have their mortgage facilities in jeopardy because of their age, because they have been waiting for so long. And she makes a reference to it as a positive feature in the running of her department. No, no, no—because she's happy to repeat things that she's said before, whatever she said before.

2070 And let me end with her on a positive note, because I think that the initiatives she has—subject to further detail—but the initiatives that she has enunciated in relation to the penalties that she wants to introduce in respect of people who have rental arrears, I think is good; the parking initiatives, which I think are good on the face of it; the penalties in relation to those who leave their flats in a bad way, which I think are also a positive move; and also the anti-social behaviour issues which she referred to—and she is right to say that we on this side of the House support what she has said in relation to all of those aspects.

2080 And Madam Speaker, as I end my contribution—I'm sure people will be happy to know—I want to make reference to, I think, all of my hon. Friends. I don't want to leave anybody out. I am really proud of what they've done, if I may say so—of each of their contributions—and, indeed, of the Hon. Leader of the Opposition, who hasn't been able to be here today as he had to attend to a personal matter.

2085 I simply raise that because I know the Chief Minister is going to make a point in his reply, but he may want to reconsider at least that. He can deal with the other criticisms he wants to make—of him, of me, and of, no doubt, each and every one of us—because it won't be pleasant; I know it never is. But he had to attend to a personal issue—if not, he would have been here, I'm sure, to support me in my contribution, as indeed he has in respect of the contributions of all my hon. Friends.

2090 My prediction, given that I was *Nostradamon*, is that there is—let's use cautious language—a strong possibility that there will be, at the time of the next election, a coalition of disgust, quite frankly, forming to throw the hon. Gentlemen and Ladies out of office.

2095 And let me end with this quote from the Democratic Senator, Ralph Larson, who said, and I quote: *"Some American people may have been born at night, but not last night"*.

Adjournment

Chief Minister (Hon. F. R. Picardo): Well, Madam Speaker, it has been almost two hours that the hon. Gentleman has entertained us. Entertaining as his contributions are — always full of adjectives and always, unfortunately, devoid of substance — it is clear, as I start to reply in this debate, that I am going to have to spend a considerable period of time dealing with hon. Members' contributions. I am going to have to do that, Madam Speaker, because they have said so many things which are factually wrong that I have to deconstruct their arguments and point them to where the facts have been provided to them, and they have failed to incorporate them into their statements.

With the Hon. Mr. Origo, in particular, who read his speech beautifully — Madam Speaker, I think you know — I don't think, if you will allow me for a moment, Madam Speaker, not to call her the honourable, but to refer to her, as we all know and love her, as Ms. Orfila. If Ms. Orfila had been his English teacher — she is not young enough to have been his English teacher — she would have been delighted with his enunciation. However, Madam Speaker, his political masters will not be so pleased with the fact that he got all the facts wrong, because that exposes them now to a reply on each of the facts, in the same way as the Hon. Mr. Bossino.

Madam Speaker, he fails to address facts in order to be able to get away with the insults that he tries to hurl in this direction — the attempt to be purely political — and he and I, Madam Speaker, as he knows, are political animals. We do not mind the politics. We think Parliaments are a place of politics. So, I do not hold against him that he has spent so long today trying to do politics, trying to bring confrontation where there isn't. He does the opposite, Madam Speaker, of what Francis of Assisi recommended: where there is calm, he tries to bring discord.

Now, I know Saint Francis isn't in scripture because it's later, but, of course, he needs to remember, when he quotes Margaret Thatcher, that the first thing Margaret Thatcher said on the steps of Downing Street when she arrived there after the Winter of Discontent in 1979 was that she saw her role — well, she arrived in 1979 — she saw her role as *bringing calm where there was discord*. He sees his role as the opposite. So, he is not, despite what he told us were his religious views, seeing his role as that of a Saint Francis. He sees his role as bringing discord where there is calm.

In other words, we all get on very well together, and he wants to get up and say that we do not. I have said I am leaving as the Leader of the Party and there is, rightly, going to be a leadership contest, and he tries to say that that is something that is bad. But Madam Speaker, whenever they have a leadership contest, they say that's a very good thing.

Hon. D J Bossino: Point of order. May I ask what it is that the Chief Minister is doing? I mean, is this his reply? Is he moving straight into the reply to all of us? Oh, then he's adjourning to another day? Oh, really.

Madam Speaker: That is resolved.

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): And so, when they have a leadership contest, it is perfectly fine that there are two of them, that they are putting different positions and that they are fighting it out. When we announce — when I announced — that I am not going to be the Leader anymore after a particular period of time and there may be a leadership contest on this side, well, that means that we are divided, that we are going to be split. It does not make any sense, Madam Speaker.

Of course, in this instance, it comes from the mouth of a man who is an expert. It comes from the mouth of a man who is an expert in leadership elections — and in losing leadership elections. So I would recommend to anybody who is thinking of standing in a leadership election in the GSLP in the future, whether it is Mr. Cortes, Mr. Santos, Ms. Arias Vazquez, Mr. Bossano, Ms. Orfila or

Mr. Feetham, that the last thing they should do is to take the Hon. Mr. Bossino's advice in respect of anything to do with a leadership election — because if they do, they are taking a loser's advice.

2150 But I will tell him this, Madam Speaker — as I will develop further when I return next week to continue with my reply — he is not the only loser on those benches. Because, of course, he's lost two leadership elections, the Leader of the Opposition has lost four elections, and Mr. Clinton was ready to lose a quarter of a million pounds. And I know they do not like that I make that point — I know they do not like that we have worked it out — but next week, I will tell them even more about why they are such losers, Madam Speaker, that Gibraltar should never entrust its fortunes to them.

2155 Because the only thing they have shown this nation is that they are capable of even failing to score an open goal. *Failing to score an open goal.* Because if the hon. Gentleman is right that I thought we were going to win the election by more and we won it by the skin of our teeth, then it does not take a political magician to understand that; it just takes an inspection of the results of the election to be able to say that.

2160 Well, Madam Speaker, what it demonstrates is that they were unable to beat us when we were weaker than we thought. What does that make them in terms of being entrusted with the future? Because if we were weaker than we thought, and we still had what it took in the end to win, then surely, Madam Speaker, if you were entrusting your children's future to someone, would you entrust it to the men and women who couldn't score against the open goal, or the men and women who were able to defend all the way to the last moment and win again?

2165 Well, Madam Speaker, the people decided. The people chose. The people chose — even if it was by the enamel — on the teeth — that one requires Sensodyne to still protect from the heat of battle and the cold of ice. But, Madam Speaker, it was enough. Just that thin layer of Sensodyne was enough to keep them out. And that is why they are left with nervous laughter, Madam Speaker. That is why they are left with a fan that tells them that everything they have done is right. That is why they are left to come here to try and somehow suggest that the things people are seeing are happening are not actually happening — the things that people are seeing and feeling we are delivering are not being delivered.

2170 But Madam Speaker, it is not just enough to tell them that, because in the discharge of their parliamentary functions, they have spoken, as they are entitled to do, on their portfolio areas of responsibility — as they are expected and entitled to do, and which we welcome. But in doing so, Madam Speaker, I have detected nuggets of constructive Opposition.

2175 But what I have been subjected to on this side of the House is a flood of negative criticism, and that is what I will have to deconstruct, Madam Speaker. And I now move that, in order to enable me to do that in a way that the whole community can see, the whole community can understand, and to put in their proper context all of the things that hon. Members have said which are nonsense — and to agree with hon. Members where they have said things which are not nonsense and are those nuggets which I hope to distil from their speeches where we might agree — that we should reconvene, Madam Speaker, on Monday at 10:30 in the forenoon to enable me to do that.

2180 So I now move the question, which is that this House do now adjourn to Monday at 10:30 a.m.

2185 **Madam Speaker:** I now put the question, which is that this House do now adjourn to Monday at 10:30 a.m. Those in favour? (**Members:** Aye.) Those against? Passed. This House will now adjourn to Monday at 10:00 a.m.

The House adjourned at 8.36 p.m.