



# PROCEEDINGS OF THE GIBRALTAR PARLIAMENT

**AFTERNOON SESSION: 4.05 pm. – 7.57 p.m.**

**Gibraltar, Thursday, 3<sup>rd</sup> 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. Christian Santos.

5       **Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism (Hon. C Santos):** Madam Speaker, I know we've just hit the post-lunch snooze slot, but I'll try and keep the next 100 minutes as interesting as possible.

      Madam Speaker, I stand before you to deliver my second Budget speech in this House. I'm honoured and proud of the work that has taken place in the last 12 months, improving  
10    services and opportunities as Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture, Tourism and Youth. And I am grateful for the support from my party and my community.

      With each portfolio comes a huge responsibility, and at times I must admit I feel the pressure, knowing my decisions will impact process, legislation and more importantly for  
15    me, people. However, it is also my privilege to spend every day making life for my community that little bit easier, fairer, equitable and hopeful.

      My mission is to create a more inclusive society where individuals, regardless of background, have accessible and empowering opportunities. My mission is to put people first and to champion those who are often overlooked and those whose voices often go  
20    unheard. It is especially these people I think about when I go into meetings, late-night briefings and make every Budget decision.

      With this principle at heart, I have worked to promote diversity and inclusion, just as I have supported our rich cultural heritage, championing our artists and cultural  
25    institutions, as culture is not a luxury, it is a necessity. It tells us who we are, binds us together and expresses our identity as Gibraltarians. Helping our tourism industry grow and adapt to global challenges is not just for the economy, it is how we share our story with the world.

      Enhancing our workplace rights and opportunities and strengthening pathways to skills development and employment is a priority, especially for the youth of Gibraltar. Investing  
30    in our young people, our future, is a must. Ensuring young people are equipped with the tools they need to succeed in a rapidly evolving economy, alongside the work for all on drugs and alcohol rehabilitation, is about creating a healthier, more prosperous community made up of people with dignity, self-worth and the chance to build their own futures.

35 The work done in equality is deeply personal to me. This isn't about statistics. It is about real people whose lives can be transformed when society views and treats everyone equally, regardless of gender, background or ability.

Madam Speaker, this is where I wish to start today, on equality, where everything we do is for the well-being of all. And this Budget speech is not just an exercise in arithmetic. It is a reflection of our values and priorities and our commitment to the people we serve.

40 Madam Speaker, I must mention how honoured I am to continue to build upon the very solid foundations set by the Hon. Samantha Sacramento as the first ever Minister for Equality in the first ever Ministry of Equality in Gibraltar. Ms Sacramento transformed the equality landscape during her successful 12-year tenure. The rights we now take for granted, such as the formal recognition of relationships between couples of the same sex and the civil marriage of same-sex couples, were unthinkable pre-2011.

45 I can now, as an openly gay man, stand in Parliament as an MP. This alone powerfully tells the story of the way our community has transformed for the better. However, our work is still not done, and it is imperative that we continue to raise awareness of equality and of all the nine protected characteristics.

50 Progress is rather linear, and as the global climate has demonstrated, the rollback on women's rights and LGBTQ+ rights can be swift and merciless. This was made so abundantly clear to me during my visit to the United Nations Commission of the Status of Women in March, marking the 30th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, which has been described as the most comprehensive and visionary agenda  
55 ever for gender equality and the human rights of all women and girls. And yet, according to a United Nations report, almost one quarter of countries reported that backlash on gender equality is hampering implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action.

Similarly, Madam Speaker, there is a pushback on LGBTQ+ rights across the world. There are those who will promote hate and even violence, and therefore there can be no  
60 let-up in our work. We must continue to promote respect for all, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity.

Views can be changed or affected by educating and raising awareness. And to this end, the Ministry of Equality continues to extend its training provision on equality matters for Government departments and across the public sector. So far this year, the team has  
65 delivered three Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging training workshops through the Department of Personnel and Development, with over 60 participants.

Additional equality workshops for the public sector are scheduled for later this year. Equality sessions have been facilitated for PGCE students at the University of Gibraltar, and the Ministry has also supported the Department of Education's in-service days for all  
70 education staff by delivering a training workshop on unconscious bias and challenging gender stereotypes in the classroom. Similarly, the Ministry of Equality works closely with the Youth Service to raise awareness of all equality matters.

The equality team were invited to attend the youth symposium held in May, which centred on gender matters, an invaluable opportunity to listen to young people's views  
75 and concerns on this topic, and to share with them the work the Ministry is doing. I am very pleased that the youth symposium serves as a link between young people and my Ministry, and we look forward to further collaborations with our colleagues in the Youth Service and in education. Gender equality is also an important part of my agenda.

80 The Women's Mentorship Programme is one of the key initiatives in our equality strategy. Madam Speaker, your notable career notwithstanding, women are underrepresented in positions of leadership and management, and the Women's Mentorship Programme seeks to redress that imbalance. A more gender-balanced workforce is the key to more productive businesses, organisations and national  
85 economies.

Since my last Budget speech, we have successfully completed the fifth and sixth cycles of the Women's Mentorship Programme in July 2024 and at the end of June 2025, respectively. Both cycles provided support to 66 mentees through one-to-one mentoring sessions and through group learning sessions, a new feature of the Programme which has  
90 been very well received. Bringing the mentees together has served to create a community of learning, networking and friendship, which I have no doubt has continued after the official end of the cycle.

I would like to thank all participants of the Programme, with special thanks to the mentors for giving back to the community through their voluntary participation, sharing  
95 their expertise and experience. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank you, Madam Speaker, for very kindly opening the doors to Parliament to the mentees for what was a singular and memorable event in the unique setting of the Gibraltar Parliament Building. It was a huge privilege for the mentees to hear directly from you and then about your sterling career. As the first woman in Gibraltar to be appointed to several top  
100 professional positions, your example of hard work and determination is truly an inspiration.

As you are only too aware, Madam Speaker, in both politics and public life, women have historically been underrepresented, with the highest ever number of women in Parliament in Gibraltar, until the last Election being 2%, 12%. Thankfully, this now stands  
105 at 4 female Elected MPs, and with your presence, Madam Speaker, the percentage of female representation in this Chamber and in this legislature now stands at 29%.

This is a very positive step, but still below the 33% of female Parliamentarians in Europe and North America, and clearly a long way from achieving parity. So inviting women to Parliament may appear to be a small step, but it is a visually powerful reminder to  
110 everyone that women belong here as much as their male counterparts. It is crucially important for all the young people of our community, but especially young women, to see role models in Parliament.

It is imperative that Parliament becomes more diverse and more accurately representative of the community it serves. A gender pay gap exists in all countries, and  
115 establishing a gender pay gap baseline for Gibraltar and narrowing and ultimately closing the gender pay gap is what we are working towards. We hope to have that data imminently, so that we can then measure it going forward.

Madam Speaker, we also continue to be committed to modernising family policies around parental leave, to ensure that all parents can have the opportunity to be present  
120 during those crucial early moments in the child's life. A more equitable distribution of leave around such an important family milestone and critical moment of child's life is an important goal we are working towards. Although this has been coined a simple legislative amendment, the number of wide-ranging social and financial implications involved require close scrutiny and revision, making this far from simple.

125 Consultations with stakeholders in both the public and private sectors are ongoing, but we have to be realistic and focus on developing the most effective plan that aligns with

the specific financial taxation and social insurance frameworks of Gibraltar. This may continue to be questioned in Parliament by the Opposition, but it is my responsibility to only instigate a solution once it has been deemed sustainable and beneficial. It is not my position to rush in blindly to appease detractors.

International Women's Day is a key date in our equality calendar. This is always an opportunity to reflect upon the issues which affect women and girls, to celebrate the success stories and to identify the gaps remaining to close. The Ministry of Equality's International Women's Day conference was inclusive, interactive and informative, featuring several panel discussions, including Wellbeing in the Workplace and the Menopause, and The Power of PAAMOA - Physical Activities Association for Mature Older Adults.

Their inclusion of male speakers on the panel, the key to cultural change, was a welcome addition too. Powerful presentations from students from the secondary schools and the Gibraltar College gave us an insight into how the younger generation feels about gender equality. With this information, my Ministry will continue working with this demographic on gender equality initiatives in conjunction with colleagues at the Youth Service and the Department of Education.

Madam Speaker, when we refer to the Ministry of Equality's work on gender equality, some people may wrongly assume that we are just referring to women's rights. I would like to clarify that the Ministry of Equality is also very much concerned with matters affecting boys and men. To this end, we marked International Men's Day this year with an even larger event than last year.

Our conference for International Men's Day 2024, Breaking Barriers, sought to engage attendees in a positive conversation about men and masculinity and how to achieve better health outcomes for boys and men, focussing on the power of positive male role models, improving boys' and men's mental health and the role of gender stereotypes in limiting beliefs and opportunities. Globally, and Gibraltar is no different, men are less likely to engage with health services and providers until they are in quite poor health. So, to raise awareness of this, we were supported on the day by the GHA's Mobile Health Unit, present outside the Sunborn, offering well-mailed health checks to attendees upon the closure of the event.

I would like to thank the GHA for their active presence on the day, for working with the Ministry of Equality in normalising health check-ups for men and for working together to ensure improved health outcomes for men. Moving forward this year, we are looking to build upon conversations on the impact of gender stereotypes on boys' and men's wellbeing across the community, working with our colleagues in the Youth Service, the Care Agency and the Department of Education to challenge the impact of certain negative stereotypes that may prevent boys and men from accessing the support they may need, and to counter some of the harmful messages promoted to boys and men through social media. Age is another protected characteristic which falls under agreement and one which we are intent on raising awareness of. We launched an End the Stereotypes campaign to coincide with the Day of Older Persons on 1 October, with a series of photographs featuring older persons released over the course of October and featured across the Government's and the Ministry of Equality's social media platforms.

The aim of the campaign was to challenge the prevailing stereotypes around older persons and to promote activities that can support a person's wellbeing and health. The campaign garnered a lot of media attention and has also served to promote the

175 organisations and the activities which support older persons. I would like to thank  
180 photographer Stephen Hermida, the Care Agency's Waterport Day Centre, the Gibraltar  
Sports and Leisure Authority, PAAMOA and the Gibraltar Football Association's Walking  
Football for supporting the campaign and providing such a fantastic service to the older  
members of our community.

185 Whilst thanking organisations, I also wish to mention the Citizens Advice Bureau for  
continuing to be an indispensable resource for our community, delivering substantial  
social and economic value not just for older persons but for everyone. Their rising case  
numbers and expanding scope of services reflects the growing reliance on their expertise  
from addressing employment, legal advice, debt and housing issues to providing mental  
health and counselling referrals. On average, the team attends to 104 clients per week.

190 It is important to highlight the primary areas of concern being addressed as this service  
clearly adds significant value to the broader Government departments. By effectively  
complementing their efforts, it helps to reduce the volume of clients approaching our  
Government agencies. Madam Speaker, I now turn to one of the most significant  
protected characteristics under our Equality Framework – disability.

195 In 2021, our Chief Minister, the Hon. Fabian Picardo, launched the Supported Needs  
and Disability Office (SNDO), with the vision of ensuring that the voices and lived  
experience of persons with disabilities and those with supported needs are placed at the  
heart of Government policy. To quote the Hon. Chief Minister, the SNDO is the heart of  
Government. It is this heart that ensures that individuals navigating their disability journey  
do not feel alone. The SNDO does this through a wide range of initiatives, including  
community clinics, which allow individuals to make contact via phone, email or WhatsApp  
to access personalised support.

200 Since its inception, the SNDO has supported over 450 families through this vital service,  
a number that continues to grow month on month. We are fortunate in Gibraltar to have  
a strong and active charitable sector. It is therefore a priority for us to continue supporting  
these organisations through the SNDO, so they can in turn continue their transformative  
work.

205 In July 2024, for example, PossAbilities installed communication boards in local  
playgrounds, one of which was Government-funded. Similarly, in January 2024, we  
supported Special Olympics Gibraltar in its successful bid to join the Global Coalition of  
Inclusion. In line with the GSLP Manifesto's commitments, the SNDO meets the key  
advocacy groups regularly, including the Dyslexia Support Group and GHITA, ensuring  
consistent dialogue and collaboration.

210 Madam Speaker, this Government listens and reacts. In my last Budget speech, I  
announced the creation of the NGO Council, which brings together 13 NGOs working  
within the disability space. Today, I am proud to announce the creation of a second  
Council, the Lived Experience Council, which is comprised of individuals who themselves  
live with supported needs and disabilities.

215 They bring their expertise to the table not through theory, but through lived reality,  
and they are instrumental in helping us identify barriers and remove them. The SNDO's  
growth since 2021 has been strategic and impactful. It is now a multifaceted agency  
working towards its goal of becoming a one-stop shop for disability services.

220 This includes the coordination of several services, such as the Blue Badge Scheme,  
which was transferred from the Ministry of Transport in April 2024. The system has been  
modernised to align with post-Brexit UK regulations, and applications are now assessed

by a professional medical panel within the GHA, which ensures only those genuinely eligible receive a badge. Currently, there are 740 active Blue Badges.

In 2025, 81% of applications were approved, and the SNDO receives an average of 20 applications per month. The Frontier Pass is also now under the SNDO, having transferred from the Ministry of Transport in April 2024. We receive an average of 10 applications per month, and in 2025, only 5.5% of applications have been denied. There are currently 204 active Frontier Passes. The Important Disability Information Card continues being a discrete effective tool to communicate needs. As from May 2025, in partnership with the Lions Club, emergency medical information was added to the card.

As long as they have been signed by a medical professional registered in Gibraltar, all applications are approved, and there are currently 278 active cards, with the SNDO receiving an average of 8 new applications per month. We are working towards a campaign in the autumn to encourage more persons with disabilities to apply to have this potentially life-saving card. The RADAR Key scheme allows access to accessible toilets across Gibraltar and the UK.

218 people have the keys currently, with the SNDO issuing three more every month. We are working with the Department of the Environment to expand across locally, as accessibility is about more than physical infrastructure. The SNDO has been working with the Gibraltar Regulatory Authority and ITLD to ensure all websites are compliant with WCAG 2.2 standards. An accessible media booklet has been developed by the SNDO, and partnerships with UK-based British Sign Language providers are enhancing BSL access in our community. Madam Speaker, this work reflects our core aim to build a society that works for all. This includes working across Government Departments, Authorities and Agencies to identify gaps and propose solutions.

For example, following recommendations from the SNDO in November, the Hon. Minister for Health created a dedicated post, which she already mentioned, in the GHA to coordinate services for individuals with disabilities and supported needs. The SNDO also plays a critical role in multi-agency coordination, including the Autism and Neurodevelopmental Pathways for the GHA, beach accessibility with the Department of the Environment, inclusive practises and cultural events, and the creation of an inclusive employment policy with the Department of Personnel and Development, which will be announced in the coming months. To ensure representation at every stage of planning, the SNDO Manager now sits on multiple boards to include the Traffic Commission, Town Planning, Blue Badge Panel, Frontier Pass Panel, Supported Employment Panel, and the Gibraltar Development Plan.

This guarantees that equity is not an afterthought, but a foundational principle in public policy and planning. Our efforts are very much underpinned by data, and the SNDO is working with the Central Database Project to develop a disability database that will allow us to extract vital statistics and forecast future needs. Training has been an area of major focus, with the SNDO delivering sessions to the GSLA for their summer sports programme, to tourism guides, to RGP and GDP recruits, to educators during inset days, and to staff across Government.

Notably, in November 2024, over 40 supported needs and disability coordinators were trained, one per department. They serve as agents of change, responsible for ensuring responsible adjustments are made for staff and service users alike, and that all practises and policies align with legislation. They are also supporting the SNDO in ensuring the Government strand of the National Disability Strategy is adhered to.

Media has also played a key role in reaching people and changing culture. The SNDO worked with local companies such as Trends in our Endless Stereotypes campaign, hosted a live *Viewpoint* segment, and participated in national events including the Count Me In conference where the SNDO manager spoke about allyship and inclusive employment. The Change Starts with Sports campaign has used power sports to shift mind sets.

Monthly sessions have included wheelchair basketball, blind football, and sit-in volleyball with a view to supporting local sporting associations in providing inclusive opportunities for all. In May we had the privilege of welcoming the British Shooting Olympic and Paralympic teams to Gibraltar, and this served as a prime example of what inclusive sports should look like.

Madam Speaker, all these initiatives reflect our commitment to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Work towards this extension and ratification in Gibraltar is actively progressing and I met with the UK Minister for Disabilities, Sir Stephen Timms, in November to discuss this in detail. I am pleased to report that technical obstacles have now been resolved and that we are working closely with the Disability Unit Cabinet Office and the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office on having this convention extended and ratified in Gibraltar. The National Disability Strategy Public Sector Strand has been researched, written and disseminated.

Department-specific objectives are in place, and a compliance officer based within the SNDO ensures accountability and provides ongoing support. The Private Sector Strand will commence in earnest this autumn with a full consultation period involving both businesses and individuals with lived experience. Madam Speaker, all these achievements both big and small mark progress in our vision for inclusion, but we cannot become complacent, and there is still much to do.

The SNDO team will continue to expand its reach, deepen its impact and build a Gibraltar that truly works for all.

Madam Speaker, in my introduction to my equality portfolio, I referred to some of the progressive steps this Government has taken to ensure that LGBTQ+ rights are properly protected by legislation. In some parts of the world, the pushback against equality, and most noticeably against LGBTQ+ rights, have been forceful and unprecedented.

As Minister for Equality, I have sought to extend protections for members of the LGBTQ+ community by strengthening the legislative provision protecting LGBTQ+ rights. Pride Month is meant to be a celebration of love, identity and resilience, but for me it brings with it a wave of criticism because of who I am. As a gay man and Gibraltar's Minister for Equality, as well as Employment, Culture, Tourism and Youth, I find myself under fire not because I am not doing the work, but because some choose to ignore the breadth of it.

I am accused of focussing solely on LGBTQ+ issues, as though my identity eclipses the dedication I bring to every part of my portfolio. As we all know, this could not be further from the truth. I serve all Gibraltarians tirelessly and with unwavering passion, driven by a deep love for my community.

My commitment to equality spans all protected characteristics, from advancing rights for women and men, to supporting our elderly, advocating for those with disabilities and building a more inclusive society for all. But while few object when we speak up for most groups, it is when we stand for LGBTQ+ rights that the volume of resistance rises.

Madam Speaker, a draft bill was published in November 2024 to amend the Crimes Act 2011 to include transgender hate crimes.



315 The proposed law means certain criminal offences, including crimes of violence, can be aggravated by reason of transgender identity. The draft law, which will be debated in Parliament in the coming weeks, also extends to stirring up hatred offences to include hatred on the grounds of transgender identity. Additionally, Madam Speaker, the Bill includes provisions to protect freedom of expression.

320 These provisions would not prohibit discussion or criticism of matters relating to transgender identity, or urging a person to refrain from conduct or practises relating to transgender identity. Last year, Madam Speaker, the Hon. Mr Bossino replied to my speech referencing Respect for All Views and Cancel Culture, where he intimated that people should not be penalised for airing their personal views on the LGBTQ+ community, 325 even if contrary to another view. This can be read on Hansard, Thursday 4th July 2024 and compassed between lines 2240 to 2255.

Freedom of belief and expression is indeed a cornerstone of democracy. As I previously mentioned, freedom of expression will be protected, but as with all freedoms, it is not absolute. Although I agree with Mr Bossino to a certain degree, when an opinion or belief 330 directly undermines or questions the dignity, worth or rights of another person, particularly those in marginalised or persecuted communities, then that belief strays beyond the bounds of respect and into dangerous territory.

We can and should respect diversity of thought, but only provided that such views do not seek to invalidate the identities or rights of others. And this is not contradictory. It is 335 correct.

LGBTQ+ individuals are not an ideology or the subject of opinion, where people, citizens, family members, colleagues and our existence and rights should not be up for debate. No view that denies us equality, dignity or safety should be granted moral weight under any circumstances. And I think we can all agree.

340 Madam Speaker, legislation is often crucial in initiating a cultural shift and changes in attitude, but we cannot rely on legislation alone. And to this end, awareness campaigns are also an important part of the Ministry of Equality's work. June is Pride Month, and this year the Ministry has, as in previous years, marked the occasion in several ways.

A writing initiative, 'Closets are for Clothes, Not People', was launched in collaboration 345 with a Trends Group for members of the LGBTQ+ community and their allies to write a short, personal and reflective piece on this theme to raise awareness and promote inclusion. Pride flags have been flown at the Frontier and at No. 6 Convent Place on the 1st and 28th of June and throughout June at St Bernard's Hospital, New Mole House, the Care Agency and the Ministry of Equality.

350 My Ministry hosted Government's first Pride conference on the 26th of June at the Sunborn, which was attended by representatives of the public and private sectors. The conference captured the many legislative changes since 2011 and heard from Charles Trico about the history of Pride in Gibraltar. Representatives of the LGBTQ+ committee also spoke on a panel and delivered a presentation on Pride at Work.

355 Issues affecting the trans community were covered in a conversation with Dr John Dean, a visiting consultant gender specialist, and the conference served to raise awareness and network. It also highlighted the support of allies to the LGBTQ+ community and it is these people who see us, respect us and stand by us who make our lives that much better. The Moorish Castle was lit up on the 28th of June with the Pride colours and 360 my team from the Ministry of Equality also supported the LGBTQ+ committee's Pride event at Casements on the 28th of June.

I would like to congratulate the LGBTQ+ committee on their hugely successful event. Walking down Main Street as part of a Pride march would have been inconceivable just a few years ago and I proudly take this as a symbol of just how far we have come.

365 These initiatives are not just important, they are necessary. As the global climate on these issues changes, we must not let our guard down. We must be vigilant and we must continue to promote the vital values of diversity and inclusion. Respect for all is a vital component of our deeply cherished social fabric and I trust that this is a value we all support.

370 Madam Speaker, as part of my overarching vision for all my Ministries and in alignment with my portfolios of Employment and Youth, I am honoured to lead on the Gibraltar Training Centre. This portfolio is particularly close to my heart as I feel immense fulfilment in developing our younger generation into valuable assets for our community. As a Government, we remain fully committed to creating an environment where continuous  
375 learning and acquisition of skills are prioritised and the Gibraltar Training Centre is the embodiment of our commitment.

Our training programmes focus on specialised trades and practical fields vital to the economy, including construction, electrical work, plumbing, engineering and more. By bridging the skills gap, we reduce our reliance on external labour and cultivate home-  
380 grown talent. Our aim is to ensure local businesses have access to professionals trained to the highest standards.

Did you get your notes Mr Origo from your colleague? Just checking. I just thought that you should be making your own notes on your own speech but that's just me.

We are promoting lifelong learning through upskilling and retraining, helping  
385 individuals adapt to evolving industries. Madam Speaker, I firmly believe that academic achievement is not the only path to success and in line with this ethos, we have been actively promoting apprenticeships and providing information to students who may not wish to pursue traditional academic routes and apprenticeships offer a robust alternative filled with opportunities. As I noted in my last Budget Address, the intake of 42 at our  
390 Gibraltar Training Centre is now undertaking in-house training for the NVQ Level 2 in maintenance operations.

Our electrical and mechanical apprentices will soon progress to NVQ Level 3 with industry placements already secured. We have worked diligently to establish a reliable network of quality placement providers who are collaborating with us to train the next  
395 generation of tradespeople. Feedback has been overwhelmingly positive, reflecting a strong commitment from the industry to develop a local skilled labour force.

While on placement, apprentices are not only gaining practical experience at building their portfolios, but also actively contributing to the upkeep and maintenance of Gibraltar's public facilities. We are exploring additional initiatives to involve apprentices  
400 in supporting charities, offering them learning opportunities while giving back to the community. To ensure the effectiveness of these placements, we have allocated additional resources to closely monitor apprentices' progress, maintaining a focus on quality and value for taxpayers.

Currently, we have 29 apprentices in our NVQ Level 2 maintenance operations  
405 programme, based full-time at the centre, who will soon transition to a day-release schedule before moving to nine months of work placements. In our mechanical and electrical programmes, 14 apprentices are completing their NVQ Level 2 and engineering operations, with most advancing to Level 3 and entering work placements lasting up to

two years. We also have 13 apprentices from previous cohorts completing their NVQ Level 2 qualifications through placements.

I am happy to report that due to increasing demand, we are planning to launch another intake in October 2025. We have recently rebranded the Centre to reflect a refreshed and dynamic approach to vocational training, promoting a structured methodology and showcasing local talent. We continue to collaborate with the local industry to train apprentices using the latest materials and equipment, preparing them for real-world work environments.

Beyond vocational qualifications, we also teach employability skills, such as work ethics, CV writing and interview preparation. This holistic approach ensures that our apprentices are well-rounded individuals, ready to contribute meaningfully to the workplace. Madam Speaker, the Gibraltar Training Centre is not just a training facility.

It is a launchpad for personal development, economic participation and national advancement. By investing in skilled trade education, we are investing in the future of Gibraltar. Our 'Little Things Big Difference' initiative exemplifies how small community-based efforts can generate significant results.

Trainees have been enhancing public spaces across Gibraltar by painting lampposts, refurbishing benches and improving infrastructure. This project provides practical experience while instilling civic pride and improving our shared environment. Our vision extends beyond the training centre itself.

Apprenticeships are now a core element of our national skills strategy, providing practical, industry-aligned opportunities that empower individuals with the experience and confidence needed to succeed. We aim to establish a modern, responsive apprenticeship system that meets the needs of our young people and industry, builds a skilled workforce and drives long-term prosperity. Over the past year, we have launched five apprenticeship programmes.

Of the 38 participants, 26 have secured employment in the trained field, reflecting the quality and relevance of the programmes. These include the Foundation Insurance Training Apprenticeship, in collaboration with the Gibraltar Insurance Institute, the Skills for Care Programme with the Care Agency, the PSV Driver and Tour Guide Apprenticeships with MH Bland Group, the Nail Technician Apprenticeship with Local Beauty Salons and the Pension Administrator Apprenticeship in collaboration with Sovereign Group. Further apprenticeship programmes are already in development, tailored to meet key sector demands and enhance future opportunities for our citizens.

In parallel with these efforts, our Ministry's PATHS programme continues to grow and at time of launch in 2024 we had 29 registered users. That number has grown to 115 with 82 actively engaged, showing a 283% increase in registrations and a 257% rise in active users. These numbers reflect both the demand for the service and its impact on employability, confidence and independence.

The team behind PATHS was recognised with the 2025 Team Award for Excellence and Innovation, acknowledging the programme's transformative effect. Our new PATHS classroom has given us the ability to hold more regular courses and we are working to ensure that all users continue to receive the support they need. The programme serves a wide range of individuals. 36% come from our supported employment cohort, 23 individuals are in the Work Reintegration Pathway, supporting transitions from HMP Windmill Hill and Bruce's Farm and others engage through employment clinics for guidance. Our Ministry has also taken strategic steps to support

inmates at HMP Windmill Hill as they prepare to rejoin the workforce. In early 2025 we introduced 5 Coracle Inside laptops, a secure UK-endorsed platform that provides offline digital learning tools.

460 These laptops offer access to educational content including literacy, numeracy, construction, CV writing and interview skills as well as wellbeing tools. This effort aligns with our 2024 Job Vacancy Gap Analysis, which identified key sectors facing labour shortages. The Coracle system helps us provide targeted upskilling in those areas.

465 The programme launched in February 2025 and from then to May, 19 inmates have completed 113 sessions across 102 courses, achieving an average score of 91.5%. This is effective rehabilitation, focused, relevant and future-orientated. Contrary to the Hon. Mrs. Ladislaus's accusations of there not being one at all, all projects I have already mentioned and will continue to mention have been in the press. One of our most impactful collaborations this year has been the HMP GFA Empowerment Project, delivered jointly with the Gibraltar Football Association. This programme uses sport to  
470 promote discipline, teamwork and personal growth, and nine inmates have graduated from the first cohort, gaining certification and confidence. We have also introduced applied philosophy sessions led by expert Eduardo Vergara Aguilera, encouraging inmates to reflect on themes like justice, identity and purpose.

475 Five inmates completed this programme, enhancing their critical thinking and sense of self. And to further improve employment readiness, we have delivered weekly driving theory lessons, enabling one inmate to successfully complete his test and pursue opportunities in logistics.

480 The HMP workshop team has contributed to meaningful community projects, including the pop-up forest installation at Europa Point and the SWIFT nest box project, offering inmates practical skills while supporting environmental causes.

We are also working with clients at Bruce's Farm to aid with work reintegration through offering courses and skills. This has also been extended to people with mental health at Ocean Views. The plan is that everyone will have the support and tools necessary to integrate back into the workplace, regardless of the circumstances.

485 These efforts represent a holistic, humane approach to rehabilitation and reintegration. Individuals are not just being prepared for employment, they are being empowered to rebuild their lives.

490 This is just the beginning. We have many exciting plans in the pipeline, and I invite Members and the public to follow our progress as we continue to deliver meaningful change across Gibraltar.

Madam Speaker, I now turn to my Employment portfolio and update the House on the work of the Department of Employment. Gibraltar's workforce is the backbone of our economy, and our duty is to ensure that the systems supporting that workforce are efficient, just and future-ready.

495 We remain deeply committed to advancing employment and labour rights, recognising that access to justice in these areas is not just essential, but a cornerstone of our Administration's values and priorities. Our commitment is reflected in the way we empower our community, by ensuring fair and equal access to legal recourse, upholding due process and protecting the rights of every individual.

500 Madam Speaker, when it comes to enforcing our employment laws, the Labour Inspectorate has been on the front foot. We have carried out inspections across all sectors to ensure that no one cuts corners, that no worker is exploited and that every business

plays by the rules. The Inspectorate isn't just there to enforce, it is there to educate, to work with employers and employees, to guide, to support and to raise standards across the board.

The Department of Employment works in close partnership with all sectors of the business community, maintaining a collaborative environment that supports a level playing field and encourages full compliance with employment standards. Through this work, we aim to build a fairer, more informed and more empowered workforce.

After a four-year break, the Careers Fair made a triumphant return in November 2024. Revived under the leadership of the Chief Secretary, Minister Cortes and myself as Minister for Employment and Youth, the event introduced an exciting new format aimed at encouraging a deeper industry collaboration and offering a more comprehensive platform of career opportunities across a variety of sectors.

The Youth Service led on this initiative, in collaboration with the Department of Employment, the Department of Education, the Department of Personnel and Development and other Government Departments and stakeholders to support the successful delivery of the Careers Fair. In a shift from previous versions, the Fair placed an emphasis on industry associations. The event organisers invited associations from different sectors to take the lead, encouraging them to bring members from their networks to represent a broader spectrum of career pathways.

These associations brought a diverse group of representatives, allowing students and anyone seeking alternative employment to explore a broad range of career paths and learn directly from professionals in their fields. The Fair was a fantastic success, with a dedicated morning session including Year 9 students and an open afternoon session for the public. Parents also appreciated the opportunity to see the various career paths available to their children first-hand too.

The overwhelming turnout and positive feedback from students, the general public and industry leaders marked the event as a major success, highlighting the strength of collaboration and broad opportunities available for young people in Gibraltar's growing job market. A huge thank you to everyone involved and a special mention to my colleague, the Minister for Housing, the Hon. Pat Orfila, who started this back when she was a school teacher. I have big shoes to fill, but I must say I am honoured to be part of this legacy.

Madam Speaker, since we launched the Frontier Worker Portal in December 2020, it has handled a substantial volume of enquiries. Each enquiry represents a person reaching out, trusting us to provide clarity, reassurance and support. And we have done exactly that, from technical guidance to resolving complex status issues.

The team has stepped up time and again to ensure that the rights of workers under the Withdrawal Agreement are respected and protected. This is clear demonstration of the high level of public engagement and reflects the essential nature of the service it provides. Our work does not stop at advice alone, and the Department remains actively engaged in the investigation of individual cases, examining workers' status and, where necessary, signposting individuals to the relevant Government Departments.

This coordinated approach ensures that rights and services in Gibraltar are not only accessible, but that they are delivered fairly and in full. I am pleased to report that this Government has taken meaningful steps to modernise the administration of cases in the Employment Tribunal. Madam Speaker, as announced by the Chief Minister during his speech on Monday, I remind this House that a Chairperson has now been appointed to every outstanding historic case.

550 This stands as clear testament to the effectiveness of the measures we have introduced. These enhancements reflect our commitment to continuously improve the overall user experience, ensuring claims are addressed promptly and effectively, guaranteeing a higher standard of service for all who seek assistance from the Tribunal.

555 The changes address the expectations of a modern Gibraltar as it continues to progress. They reflect the standard of justice to which the people of Gibraltar are rightfully entitled to, and under this Administration, that standard is being delivered.

560 Madam Speaker, let me now turn to something close to my heart, the health and safety of our people. I would like to draw attention to the important work we have been undertaking as part of the Health and Safety Advisory Council, which I have the continued privilege of chairing.

565 Last November, we hosted our third Health and Safety Seminar under the banner Providing Safe and Healthy Work in the Digital Age, and it was a resounding success. We brought together employers, public servants, unions and NGOs, because workplace safety is everyone's business. And this October, we will do it again - We will never stand still when it comes to protecting our people.

This ongoing initiative reinforces our commitment to promoting safe, healthy and adaptable workplaces as we navigate the challenges of our never-evolving working world. I would like to take a moment to express my condolences once again to the family and friends of the soul we tragically lost at sea on 20 May.

570 As my esteemed colleague the Chief Minister stated in his official press release, this was the first death at work in this Government's 14 years in office, and it must serve to remind us all of the importance of Health and Safety in all workplaces.

575 The work done by my Department is in the hope to educate, to make workers and employers aware of the importance of Health and Safety in all they do in order to try and avoid tragedies such as this. Madam Speaker, I am pleased to inform this House that we are also making real progress in modernising how the Department of Employment works.

580 Our digitisation of employment records is not just an administrative upgrade, it is a leap into a smarter, greener future, one with less paper, more efficiency, faster access, better service and, crucially, a clear step towards sustainability. At the same time, this shift would improve the way we serve our community, allowing for faster and more secure access to information and better inter-departmental coordination. Ultimately, it will help us deliver a higher standard of service to individuals and businesses alike, and this initiative stands as a key pillar in our ongoing digital transformation strategy and building a Department that is modern, environmentally responsible and ready to meet the needs of an evolving workforce.

585 Now, Madam Speaker, I want to address what is perhaps the clearest indicator of a successful employment policy – the number of people in work. I am proud to inform this House that the average number of registered unemployed Gibraltarians in 2024 was just 20, that is a 95.57% reduction since 2011. In the first quarter of this year, the figure stood at 22, a 96% drop since the first quarter of 2012.

590 These are not just statistics, and this is not by chance, but by design, through targeted support, youth engagement, skills development and career guidance, whether someone is unemployed or simply looking to grow, the Department of Employment is there at their side every step of the way. The PATHS initiative has created a seamless pathway for young people to re-enter the workforce. It is person-centred and it is working.

Maintaining low unemployment levels is not coincidental, but the result of the consistent, dedicated work of my team at the Department of Employment, and we remain committed to providing all users with the tools they need to succeed, whether they are just beginning their career journey or seeking to explore new opportunities. The Government's proven record of employment stability has been built on close working relationships, listening to those we serve and tailoring our response to the unique needs of each individual seeking employment.

The Department also supports those already in employment who are seeking to improve or advance their career prospects. Whether it is exploring new opportunities, upskilling or transitioning to a new role, the Employment Service is designed to meet a broad range of needs. In doing so, we are not only supporting individual career aspirations but also strengthening Gibraltar's overall economic stability and growth.

Madam Speaker, the value of this work is not only visible in the numbers, as impressive as they are, but in the quality and care of the support provided. Our ongoing commitment is clear, to maintain the momentum, to continue delivering results and to ensure that Gibraltar's employment landscape remains strong, inclusive and full of promise. This commitment lies at the very heart of our work, and it is evidently reflected in the outcomes we have achieved together.

Madam Speaker, when I spoke in this House last year, I shared my belief that supporting young people is not about developing programmes or delivering statistics. It is about recognising potential and providing opportunity. I said then, and I happily repeat myself today, I don't just see data, I see faces, stories and lives in progress. This past year, we have worked to turn those words into action. We have supported young people in practical ways through training, outreach and by creating spaces where they feel they belong. We have listened to their voices, not just through formal consultations, but in real conversations.

I have seen what happens when we get it right. When a young person feels seen, heard and respected, they grow, they engage and they lead. That is why I remain committed, not just to leading this Ministry, but to helping build a culture that truly invests in its youth.

As I have on numerous occasions mentioned to my hon. Member in Opposition, the Youth Service is not only about our youth clubs, though these remain a vital and valued space for engagement, the service plays a much wider role in helping our young people navigate the complex transition from education to adulthood, including into employment.

This year will mark a significant milestone for Gibraltar's young people with the development of our first-ever Gibraltar Youth Strategy, an inclusive vision that places the voices, needs and aspirations of young people at the heart of Government policy. This Youth Service Government-led initiative has been developed through research and engagement that started last year involving young people aged 8 to 25, as well as professionals and NGOs from across our community. Senior Youth Worker Rebecca Figueras has led on this project since last year and continues to work on this.

The strategy will be released later this year and sets out pathways to ensure that all young people, regardless of background or ability, have the opportunities, support and resources they need to thrive, to be heard and to play an active role in shaping the Gibraltar of tomorrow. As part of this strategy, we already successfully supported Childline in the creation of the new Teenline service launched at the Plater Youth Club. We are committing dedicated funding to begin implementing the strategy's key priorities.

These include the pilot launch of targeted youth support, the expansion of the Careers.gi platform and the development of inclusive youth-led initiatives such as the Gibraltar Youth Symposium.

645 This strategy is more than a document. It is a community-wide commitment to invest in the future of our youth. Through cross-departmental collaboration and ongoing feedback, we will ensure that every young person in Gibraltar has the opportunity to realise their full potential.

650 And one of the key areas we have focused on this year is career development and employment opportunities. We understand how crucial it is for young people to have access to relevant information and guidance as they navigate the path toward their future careers. With that in mind, I am excited to announce that the Careers.gi platform is expanding to include more comprehensive resources and information for young people seeking employment opportunities and it will be developed as a central hub where career-related information is readily accessible. This expansion is in collaboration with the  
655 Departments of Education, Employment and Personal Development to ensure that we create a collaborative space where young people can access advice, training and job opportunities in one central place.

We are working closely with stakeholders to develop a system that allows us to track  
660 each young person's journey from education into employment. The aim is simple but vital – to ensure that no young person falls through the cracks and that every individual is supported throughout this critical transition.

Madam Speaker, we recognise that not all young people are in education or employment, and it is vital that we don't leave anyone behind. The Zone's Step Up and  
665 Thrive programme for young people who are neither in education nor employment continues to provide them with a safe space to connect, learn and grow.

Through mentorship, skills development and support, we are helping them make a positive step forward in their lives. The Youth Service is committed to providing a diverse range of services that cover a broad spectrum of young people's needs. Our focus areas  
670 include informed Education, Health, Environmental awareness, Wellbeing, Culture, Arts and Sports.

By offering these, we ensure that young people have the chance to develop well-rounded skills, nurture their creativity, improve their mental and physical health and discover new passions. The Young Leaders Programme is designed for young people aged  
675 14 to 17 who want to develop leadership skills, support youth work and make a positive impact in their community. Participants assist youth workers in running activities, events and projects while gaining valuable experience in communication, teamwork and responsibility.

One of the most encouraging developments we've seen in the past year is the significant increase in the use of our facilities. The Youth Service offers four youth clubs – Plater, Laguna, Dolphins and the Youth Centre – that are open throughout the week. Over the last 12 months, we have seen an 8.9% rise in the number of young people using our facilities on a weekly basis. This means that over 300 young people are now benefiting from the services and opportunities we offer on a regular basis. This increase is not just a  
685 statistic. It is a reflection of the growing trust and value that young people place in what we provide.



Madam Speaker, as mentioned last July, we launched Gibraltar's first Youth Symposium to provide young people with a platform to share their views and help shape the policies that affect them. The Symposium has since developed into a dynamic platform for dialogue between young people and the Minister for Youth. There is a point that the Hon. Mr Origo seemed to not pay heed to during my speech last year and made reference in his to the little work being done by this Government to encourage young people into politics.

What this Government has done is create a Symposium that gives every young person a voice and a chance to join debates and meaningful conversations directly with decision makers in order to influence policy and change. Case in point, my friend and colleague Minister Arias Vazquez, Minister for Health, attended an early session of the Youth Symposium. She discussed young people's concerns of mental health and community mental health support and taking these dialogues and opinions into consideration has remodelled how mental health and wellbeing services are provided to young people, with a particular focus on ensuring young people receive appropriate support as and when required.

Madam Speaker, I can also report that we are rolling out Parliamentary visits for our youth in conjunction with our Ministry of Equality team, with the aim of mirroring other European states and increasing political interest within our youth, and in particular for young women and girls.

Getting young people involved in politics is focussing on everyone, not just trying to get people to join one specific Political Party's Youth Sector. Since the symposium's inception, we have held nine more meetings, most in a Q&A format, to listen closely to concerns and priorities.

In response, we have introduced several targeted initiatives highlighting what they believe works well and identifying areas for improvement. These discussions have been thematically categorised to clearly reflect emerging concerns, including mental health and wellbeing, vocational and non-academic pathways, careers advice, apprenticeships and employment opportunities, safe social events for under-16s, access to inclusive public spaces such as parks and skateparks, and gender equality issues. Following the meeting on 18 March, a group of motivated young people expressed interest in launching Saturday evening sessions at the Youth Centre, featuring games, nights planned and led by the participants themselves.

The Youth Service is now working collaboratively with a symposium group to co-create a youth-led curriculum for these sessions, shaped around the topics and discussions that young people feel are most relevant and meaningful to them.

Another notable development is their ambition to strengthen their connection as a group, which was achieved through a cultural and social trip to Morocco in June 2025. I am sure the Hon. Mr. Origo would be overjoyed to hear this, given his apparent fixation with the Youth Service organising trips as voiced repeatedly during Parliament sessions.

This trip included a cultural trip to Morocco's Cheshire Home, offering participants immersive experiences, exposure to local traditions and visits to historical sites, providing them with awareness, cultural appreciation and personal growth. Meanwhile, The Mingle supports young adults aged 18 to 30 with diverse needs through weekly sessions at the Youth Centre. In partnership with the College of Further Education, attendees take part in activities such as cooking, creative projects and life skills training to focus on fostering independence and inclusion.

735 The Youth Service continues to focus on environmental sustainability, proudly joining the Eco-Festival at Europa Pool to promote planet protection. We also supported the Special Olympic Ceremony, celebrating the resilience and achievements of its inspiring athletes, a lot of whom attend The Mingle group. These events highlighted the values of teamwork, determination and community.

740 And in a heart-warming moment this year, the incredible dedication and hard work of our youth workers was firmly acknowledged and celebrated by Her Worship the Mayor, Ms. Carmen Gomez GMD. This recognition was a reminder of the vital role that our youth workers play in shaping the lives of young people and supporting them as they navigate their journey through adolescence. We are incredibly proud of the youth workers who go  
745 above and beyond every day to make a difference. Our Nautilus award-winning Denim Renewed Project fostered creativity and life skills as young people transformed denim into personalised art. And we also hosted GFA Street football tournaments, which have recently recommenced, promoting fitness, teamwork and community through fun and inclusive competition.

750 Youth activities from July 2024 to 2025 included, amongst many others, outings to Europa Pool, Bahia Park, the Gibraltar Fair, paddle boarding at Sandy Bay, water activities with the Gibraltar Regiment, which offered fun and nature-based bonding experiences. And the Bosom Buddies fashion show and Time to Shine encouraged creative self-expression. October's Halloween event at Laguna Youth Club fostered community spirit,  
755 while February's Know Yourself, Grow Yourself exhibition highlighted youth mental health perspectives.

We are also in the process of implementing a targeted youth support programme to identify young individuals who are showing signs of becoming at risk of disengagement, truancy or behavioural issues, with the assistance of other stakeholders such as the  
760 Department of Education, GHA and Care Agency. This year, the Youth Service has prioritised personal and professional development to ensure our team continues to deliver high-quality support.

Staff completed essential training in GDPR, Health and Safety and Dyslexia, alongside specialised courses in Mental Health, Safeguarding, Cultural Competency, LGBTQ+,  
765 inclusivity, leadership and team-building workshops, further strengthened collaboration and growth, keeping us responsive to the evolving needs of young people.

A strong collaborative team is the foundation of everything we do, and by fostering a culture of mutual respect, shared knowledge and professional growth, we ensure that our Youth Workers not only excel individually but also contribute to the overall success of the  
770 Youth Service.

Over the past year, we have partnered with various local and international agencies to offer specialised training in areas such as Drug Substance Abuse Awareness, Career Development and Guidance, and Digital Literacy and Online Safety.

As from September, we have a new Supported Needs and Disability Coordinator for  
775 the Youth Service and take part in workshops and meetings to improve services as part of the disability strategy. Madam Speaker, I am also very pleased to inform you that the Youth Service has employed 10 non-permanent Youth Support Workers who will work to support the full-time team at the Youth Service. Two of them have started as trainees and will have to complete their training within a year in order to gain the understanding and  
780 knowledge needed to work with young people, and all new entrants must undergo Safeguarding and Child Protection Training.

I can announce that the Laguna Youth Club obtained planning permission last November 2024 to be completely refurbished, and its location at Glacis and an extension will be added above to provide a multi-purpose hall where young people will be able to enjoy extra space to carry out physical activities. We will also update and modernise the Plater Youth Club for young people in the Upper Town area. My aim is not only to empower young people, but to celebrate their achievements too.

In February, I introduced the Youth Achievement Awards, as I feel it is important to celebrate the success of young people in our community, not just in different established disciplines, but on individual achievement. Thirty-five nominations were received, with nine awards presented for Leadership Skills, Volunteering, Being Role Models and Breaking Stereotypes, for protecting the environment and for offering opportunities through outdoor learning. The awards will now become an annual event, and I am incredibly proud of everything we have achieved together over the past year.

But more importantly, I am excited for what lies ahead. I hope that by highlighting some of the key initiatives and comprehensive work carried out by our Youth Service, I have made it clear to the hon. Member that our efforts extend far beyond the scope of traditional Youth Clubs' opening times.

Madam Speaker, the hon. Member opposite does not seem to have come to grips with how we invest in our young people. Last year, the hon. Member cited that youths are by far the area that least money gets spent on. However, this assertion is not necessarily accurate, as the £683,000 figure assigned to Youth in the Budget refers specifically to the Youth Service alone. In reality, young people are supported across a wide range of Budgetary areas, which include our education system, which benefits over 9,000 young people and forms a cornerstone of our investment in the Youth, our Health Services and our Equality policies.

Indeed, I could go on listing the various parts of our Budget where young people are included, demonstrating that our commitment to youth extends far beyond one Budget line. So, after months of uninformed, unresearched questions in Parliament by the Hon. Mr Origo regarding the Youth Service provision, I sincerely hope that my Budget speech has finally given him the background and information he may need. I live in hope that this will finally avoid future questions like what Youth Workers do when the Youth Centres are not open.

The full question can be read on Hansard of Wednesday 19 March 2025 from line 808. But just in case, to summarise, the Youth Service stands as a comprehensive and dynamic support network for young people in Gibraltar, delivering a wide range of initiatives, including informal education, career guidance, mental health support, creative arts projects, sports and outdoor activities, community engagement events and inclusive programmes for young people with diverse needs. This has made possible through strategic collaboration with the Department of Education, the Care Agency, GHA, the Ministry of Culture, Employment and Training, as well as a wide range of NGOs and together these partnerships ensure that the Youth Service continues to empower, support and uplift our young people.

Madam Speaker, I now move on to the important work done by the Drugs and Alcohol Rehabilitation Services (DARS), operated under the Care Agency. At its core, DARS is deeply committed to rehabilitation, reintegration and recovery. These are not just services, they are lifelines offered by a skilled team rooted in trauma-informed care, therapeutic practise and safeguarding.

830 Their work is carried out with compassion, professionalism and diligence, supporting individuals in our community battling substance misuse and addiction. The Care Agency's Therapeutic Services manage some of the most complex and high-risk cases in Gibraltar, with many clients having experienced emotional, physical or sexual abuse, while others deal with the long-term effects of neglect and trauma. DARS meets these challenges in close coordination with partners across the Ministries of Health, Justice, Education and Housing.

835 In the past year, the service has implemented strategic reforms and operational enhancements, including a complete overhaul of policies and client care procedures, a restructured timetable to deliver more effective programming, reinstatement of one-to-one therapeutic sessions within the community and continued aftercare through structured group support. Weekly multidisciplinary team MDT meetings have also been introduced, significantly improving coordinated care. DARS now works closely with the Gibraltar Health Authority, particularly psychiatry, dietetics and the registration department.

845 A key development is the introduction of a comprehensive drugs and alcohol services pathway plan, promoting integrated person-centred care through inter-agency collaboration. The multi-agency steering group continues to guide the strategic direction of the service and includes Senior leaders from Public Health, Mental Health Services, Primary Care, Education, Housing and the Royal Gibraltar Police. This forum is essential for setting shared objectives and ensuring accountability.

850 One of the most significant advancements is the expansion of Bruce's farm residential programme. Capacity has increased from 13 to 16 beds, providing more individuals with access to life-saving support. Facility improvements, including refurbished kitchens, a new multi-purpose AstroTurf sports area and a robust maintenance schedule reflect an ongoing commitment to delivering safe, high-quality care.

855 The Dry House, a transitional housing initiative, continues to support individuals reintegrating into the community after residential rehabilitation. Plans are underway for a second house specifically for female clients, reflecting the service's responsiveness to evolving needs. Community-based therapeutic services have also progressed.

860 The reach of relapse prevention programmes like the Phoenix and Freedom Initiatives has expanded and the innovative VOICE programme has been introduced. In partnership with the Gibraltar Youth Services team, DARS is engaging younger clients, aged 18 to 25, with a focus on psychoeducation, integration and building resilience. Working closely with all stakeholders of the Drug Advisory Council, we have launched our outreach programme into the different youth clubs and will soon release an awareness campaign on drugs and alcohol addiction.

865 Family support continues to be a cornerstone of the service. Structured group sessions and one-to-one support aim to strengthen family bonds and build supportive networks around each individual, recognising the essential role families play in recovery. The professional development of staff remains a top priority and training in trauma-informed practise has equipped the team to meet the nuanced needs of clients, further enhancing the quality of care.

870 Looking forward, plans are being developed to establish a dedicated community hub, designed to provide integrated support in one location, and this initiative responds to the substantial growth in community-based services and the aim to meet people where they are. The impact of these efforts is evident in the numbers. Referrals have increased from

150 to 162 this year, a rise that not only indicates a growing need, but also a growing confidence in the service.

Clinical hours delivered in the community have increased from 624hrs to 696hrs, demonstrating enhanced efficiency and commitment to face-to-face care. Admissions to  
880 Bruce's Farm have grown from 52 to 58, reflecting both the expanded bed capacity and improvements in facility operations. And each statistic represents a person, a life being rebuilt, a family being reunited, a future being reclaimed.

Bruce's Farm continues to offer a safe and structured residential environment where individuals begin their recovery with dignity and purpose. The increase in admissions is a  
885 direct result of strategic improvements, from increased bed capacity to refurbished communal areas and enhanced therapeutic spaces. I extend my deepest gratitude to the DARS team, our interagency partners, and every professional who supports some of Gibraltar's most vulnerable with unwavering dedication.

This Government remains firmly committed to sustaining and expanding these vital  
890 services. We will continue to provide the resources, infrastructure, and vision necessary to support recovery, promote dignity, and build stronger, healthier communities. An important factor of a healthy and thriving community is its culture.

And Madam Speaker, as Minister for Culture, I am delighted my team at Gibraltar Cultural Services has continued its work to ensure our cultural offering and its  
895 development, both in Gibraltar and abroad, remains at the heart of the Government's agenda. My motivation and aspirations remain to have culture for all, highlighting excellence, innovation, diversity, engagement, and outreach. Time and time again, culture proves it has value for money.

I said it in my introduction, and I shall repeat it now. Culture is not a luxury. It is a  
900 necessity.

Whether it is art, music, architecture, performing arts, or other genres of the humanity spectrum, culture is what creates our community's social fabric, identifies us, and ties us together as people. I am so proud of what has been achieved over the decades through events, cultural development and education, improvements and investment in cultural  
905 facilities and premises, and much more. And I give my guarantee that together with all stakeholders, we will ensure culture continues to thrive and grow from strength to strength.

A myriad of community events have been organised, including *Calentita*, which was held in July 2024 and again in June 2025, an event focused on our gastronomy, such an  
910 important part of our history and culture. As part of the new summer events, we saw the reintroduction of the Summer Nights on Tour, which included successful family events held at Eastern Beach and Casemates Square in 2024. Three Summer Nights events have already been announced for 2025 in different areas around Gibraltar to support as many different local businesses as possible.

The theatre community had our support internationally, with theatre makers participating at the UK National Drama Festival and Bayside and Westside Drama Group representing Gibraltar at the UK Duncan Rand Festival. The 68th Gibraltar International Drama Festival in March was also as popular as ever, with a week-long programme of plays giving several groups the experience of treading the boards. The world of literature  
920 was treated to an audience with David Walliams as a prelude to the GIBUNCO Gibraltar Literary Festival, with both an event catering for 1,600 children and an evening event which was really well received. This event was at no cost to the taxpayer, as it was self-

funding. This is an example of more fringe events we will hold in the coming months as part of the Tourism led Strategy.

925 Specifically for our young people, we brought back the Young Shakespeare Company in May, with the support of the John McIntosh Educational Trust. 2,500 upper-primary and secondary school students watched performances of Twelfth Night, with an educational workshop on the dramatic arts also on offer.

930 The Trust also supported the 2025 Youth Arts Jamboree, which is part of our cultural drive to encourage young people to be the cultural leaders of tomorrow. Projects included the Gibraltar International Dance Festival, the Festival for Young Musicians, the Young Art Competitive Exhibition, and the ever-popular World Book Day celebrations. Workshops were also organised in conjunction with the Gibraltar Youth Service, the Scouts and Guides Association, amongst others. Guy Fawkes at Little Bay Car Park was also introduced  
935 in conjunction with the Scouts Association, including entertainment by the Sea Scouts pipe bands as well as DJs, and it was enjoyed by people of all ages. I am pleased to confirm that this will go ahead in November again this year.

The 6th Culture Awards Ceremony celebrating the best of Gibraltar's arts and culture was aired on GBC TV and our social media platforms. This annual event is growing year on  
940 year and goes to highlight the talent Gibraltar has to offer in this field. The Christmas period in Gibraltar is indeed something to celebrate, and the Christmas Wonderland events held in November and December were certainly bigger and better than in previous years. Over 8,000 people attended the Christmas Festival of Lights and 1,000 people attended the Christmas party the day after.

945 The two-day event saw entertainment by local cultural groups, International Act 'Queen Revolution', fair attractions running for over six weeks to the delight of children in our community, as well as late-night shopping to support our business community, further supported by two Christmas Saturdays in town. With entertainment including marching bands, dance groups and choirs, these were intended to attract local business  
950 as well as tourist investment. This year, the traditional Festival of Lights will take place again in November 2025.

And the New Year celebration, produced on our behalf by GIB Media, is also on our annual calendar. The Three Kings' Cavalcade brought the Christmas celebrations to a close, with thousands lining Main Street once again to enjoy the spectacle. And I want to  
955 take a moment to thank our partners in the entertainment and cultural industry who help us offer the best events and offerings possible.

My thanks to GIB Media, Fresh Entertainment, all the different dance groups, musicians, actors and singers, and everyone who collaborates year-round to ensure Gibraltar can continue to offer a cultural calendar we can all be proud of. Also, my thanks  
960 to the individuals who offer their time, like the speakers of GIB Talks, its 10th edition taking place last February. The speakers' stories and experiences continue to draw and entertain audiences. The 11th edition will return to the stage in January 2026.

The Gibraltar Magic Festival attracted thousands of locals and tourists, and the Zarzuela made a comeback this year with La Verbena de la Paloma to a packed John  
965 Mackintosh Theatre. Madam Speaker, we are always trying to innovate, and this year we introduced the Candlelight Concerts.

The first was a Christmas concert on strings at the Cathedral of the Holy Trinity, and the most recent was Queen on Strings in April at St. Michael's Cave. Both performed to

sold-out audiences, as did the celebration of opera's second classical concert organised with the Gibraltar Philharmonic Society last October.

Heritage Week was a special event on our calendar this year, marking the 80th anniversary of VE Day. This was a successful collaboration between the Ministry of Culture, the Gibraltar Tourist Board, and the Gibraltar Heritage Trust. The weekend included a rich and engaging celebration of Gibraltar's history and cultural heritage, attracting tourism to Gibraltar and shining a spotlight on our military history. A moving commemorative ceremony was held at the Moorish Castle, and other activities during the weekend included street art tours for schools, walking tours, the annual heritage painting competition organised by the Gibraltar Heritage Trust, performances by GAMPa and JF Dance, and an interactive storytelling session. The Victorian Re-enactment Association from the UK and the Gibraltar Re-enactment Society, as well as the Gibraltar Band and Drums Association, also took part in these events.

Gibraltar Cultural Services, on behalf of the Ministry, also runs its usual programme of events and festivals. This includes the Autumn and Spring events, International Art Competition, the Gibraltar Fair and National Day events, Workers' Memorial Day and literary competitions, amongst other offerings.

Madam Speaker, I am sure you can say we have kept busy making sure the cultural calendar is of as much quality as it is quantity. Madam Speaker, the focus on culture is not just about entertainment, though my vision is also to develop and educate. GCS has become an approved activity provider, an AAP, as part of the Duke of Edinburgh's International Award, Gibraltar, with the aim of offering cultural and arts-related activities that will allow award participants to develop their skills in these areas while contributing to GCS through specific projects and activities.

A new volunteer scheme was launched in January, aimed at encouraging individuals to play a vital role in supporting the cultural sector, seeking to strengthen community involvement while promoting the arts and highlighting the value of volunteering to foster cultural and personal growth. Putting Gibraltar on the international map is of the utmost importance for me, both as Minister for Culture and for Tourism. To this end, we supported artists Monica Popham and Jack Hernandez at their participation at the International Art Fair in March and participated at the Patras Poetry Festival in Greece with local poet Jonathan Teuma representing Gibraltar.

Plans for participation at the 2025 event with two local poets are already underway. We supported the 2025 Orkney Island Games cultural programme and also Freeman of the City and internationally renowned artist Christian Hook at his exhibition and event at the National Portrait Gallery in London. Participation at the London Book Fair in March 2025 by members of GCS and the Gibraltar National Book Council led to networking and promotional opportunities with attendees also attending a writers' summit.

Participation at the Cultural Enterprise Conference in London in March 2025 with industry professionals led to interesting talks on challenges faced by the industry and ways to maximise participation and audiences amongst other things. The third cultural exchange with Morocco was launched in April under the banner 'A Tale of Two Cities' organised in conjunction with Gallery Kent in Tangier. It included an art exhibition showcasing works by seven local artists offering an opportunity to highlight all the work done by GCS on behalf of the Ministry of Culture to promote cultural and artistic links with Tangier over the last few years.

1015 As part of its development drive, GCS has supported various publications including Alice's Table Six by Alice Mascarenhas and The Boy and His Demon by Kelvin Llambias. It also Elected Sheridan Povedano to take part in the Young Adult Writing Mentorship programme. A new cultural programme was produced with GBC based on the Ilanito language which proved very popular and has now been converted into a podcast as an  
1020 extended Ilanito programme. GCS also supported GBC with the Book Club TV programme. The development of young people in culture is of utmost importance.

The celebration of World Book Day 2025 attracted hundreds of students from local schools to the John Macintosh Hall, celebrating classic fairy tales and the Brothers Grimm books and exploring different stories and themes through arts and crafts activities, storytelling and performance.  
1025

An interactive public storytelling session by GAMPA was well attended too, giving others the chance to celebrate the occasion. Also, as part of World Book Day, a free book was given to every pupil in Year 1 and Year 2. The presentation at Bookgem saw representatives of each school involved with over 800 books of The Adventures of  
1030 Paddington Farmscape issued in Gibraltar that week.

The promotion for a love of reading books and literature was actively done throughout February and March with numerous school visits and tours at the library where pupils from different year groups enjoyed storytelling and were encouraged to become active library members.

1035 Over the past year, Gibraltar Cultural Services has led and supported a wide array of cultural initiatives aimed at celebrating local heritage, fostering creativity and promoting engagement across all age groups. One of the highlights was the production of the Calle Comedia Kasbar event as part of National Week showcasing diverse artistic expressions.

On June 3rd, GCS organised the 10th anniversary rededication of the Mario Finlayson National Gallery. The event featured an open day, the launch of Shane Dalmedo's book on heritage, artist and freeman of the city, Gustavo Bacarisa, and a series of fireside chats that added depth to the cultural dialogue. If any member has not yet been, please go.  
1040

It's a fabulous exhibition celebrating not just a heritage artist but also our renowned Christian Hook. Culture Crawls, led in partnership with historian Dr. Ryan Asquez, used street art to educate about Gibraltar's rich history and heritage, drawing strong public interest. A new initiative, Discovering Our People, was launched to highlight Gibraltar's multicultural identity by capturing stories from residents of all backgrounds. This project underscores our unique cultural fabric.  
1045

Additionally, GCS introduced artist Kyrane Lia's Barriers and Planters project along Main Street. Her artwork, which I have no doubt everyone has already seen, commemorates pivotal moments in Gibraltar's history, now enhanced with QR codes offering visitors access to detailed historical context which has already received thousands of online interactions.  
1050

Support for artistic development continues through activities like the Silent Book Club at Bookgem, writing and technical theatre workshops, and seasonal events. GCS's support for the ROC retreat is ongoing with projects throughout 2025 and a biennial residency scheduled for May 2026. These engagements use Gibraltar's history and culture as a foundation for international artistic exploration.  
1055

GCS also maintains strong links with education and institutions. Tours of the Mario Finlayson National Gallery, City Hall, and Gemma Gallery have been widely attended by schools such as St. Joseph's, St. Anne's, Prior Park, Westside, and St. Bernard's, with  
1060



tailored educational resources provided. International groups from Spain and Morocco continue to visit in coordination with the Mayor's Office, the Heritage Trust, and other partners supporting the promotion of local art and artists.

1065 Gemma Gallery remains a vibrant cultural space, hosting events including the Youth  
Services Children's Mental Health Art Exhibition, Rock Retreat's, Zine Exhibition on Home,  
the Visual Arts Graduate Show, and the Heritage Trust's Annual Painting Exhibition. It also  
offers various themed workshops for children which are always well-received. The  
1070 Cultural Organisation's Register and Directory remain active and updated, aligned with  
safeguarding policies, and GCS has also launched a new research project on the life and  
work of Leni Mifsud.

Annual cultural staples like Halloween events, Santa's Grotto, and Winter Tale  
storytelling further demonstrate GCS's year-round commitment to Gibraltar's cultural  
development. A new Cultural Act was approved in Parliament in December 2024, making  
1075 provision for the management, enhancement, and enjoyment of culture in Gibraltar, and  
will provide for all connected cultural matters. We also introduced a subsidy for elite  
performers as part of a new Elite Funding Programme with the aim of allowing young  
artists to have the opportunity of specialist training and study.

Nine young people benefited from this programme in financial year 2024/2025.  
1080 Madam Speaker, GCS, on behalf of the Government, acquired 47 new artworks over the  
last year for the Government's art collection at a total cost of £36,532. This includes  
purchases at auction and from private collections, winners in the Government's art  
competitions, and purchases from the Affordable Art Exhibition and solo shows.

Many of the paintings included works by heritage artists, such as Gustavo Bacarisa,  
1085 Rudecindo Mania, and Jacobo Azagury, as well as many of our contemporary artists.  
Madam Speaker, over the last year, the John McIntosh Hall Library has continued to  
enhance its services and outreach. As Gibraltar's official agency for the International  
Standard Book Number, the ISBN, the Library represented Gibraltar at the ISBN  
Conference in Paris.

1090 A new library card design competition was launched, attracting over 50 entries, with  
four winners elected. Social media platforms have been actively used to promote  
storytelling sessions, school visits, and literary initiatives. Significant investments were  
made in new book acquisitions and the BorrowBox platform, which offers e-books, e-  
audiobooks, e-magazines, and e-press.

1095 Membership on BorrowBox has grown to 965, nearly 200 more than last year, with e-  
press, especially UK newspapers and magazines, proving the most popular. New e-books  
in Spanish, French, and Italian were also added to support Gibraltar's bilingual and  
multilingual community. The Library's membership now stands at 6,384, with 567 new  
members in the last year.

1100 Weekly storytelling sessions supported by dedicated volunteers remain popular with  
the Library, also boasting a growing collection of books by Gibraltarian authors and on  
Gibraltar-related topics, supported by the John McIntosh Educational Trust. Since June  
2024, 50 ISBNs have been issued for local publications. Refurbishing and maintaining  
cultural venues is key to supporting artists and raising the standard of artistic expression.

1105 We are also committed to improving accessibility across all cultural buildings through  
future upgrades. By ensuring accessibility, we strive to create inclusive spaces for all  
members of our community. As Minister for Equality, this is paramount to me, and I firmly

believe that by investing in Gibraltar's cultural infrastructure, we are making a substantial investment in the advancement of the arts.

1110 A total of £113,910 has been invested in works at Central Hall, Inces Hall, John McIntosh Hall, Gustavo Bacarisa Gallery, Gemma Gallery, City Hall, and the Fine Arts Gallery. Madam Speaker, we continue to make significant progress on all Government cultural premises and estates. We have undertaken various works in several locations, such as Retrenchment Block, Recreational Rooms, Jumpers Bastion, Wellington Front, 1115 Prince Edward's Road, Town Range, Bayview, and Line wall Road, and other premises, totalling £78,690.

Looking ahead to the annual calendar of events, we have the 10th anniversary rededication of the Gemma Contemporary Art Gallery, Octoberfest at Ocean Village, the refreshed outlook of the Gibraltar Jazz Festival, and an art exhibition by Moroccan artists 1120 in Gibraltar in March in conjunction with Gallery Kent. We also have a new cultural exchange in collaboration with the Lloyds Group of London, where Gibraltarian artists will exhibit at the NoHo Studios in the West End in May 2026, with a UK artist reciprocated by exhibiting in Gibraltar in July. Madam Speaker, as you can see, culture remains a very important part of my work, and my plan is to continue with the betterment of the old and 1125 the creation of new opportunities for all.

So Madam Speaker, I now turn my attention to the Gibraltar Air Terminal and its performance over the last financial year. In 2024, passenger traffic reached 424,386, which marks the third consecutive year since the pandemic with over 400,000 passengers. We see an increase of 12.8% since we came back from Covid in 2021. British Airways 1130 recorded impressive numbers on the Gibraltar-London-Heathrow route, underlining the route's continued strength. At the same time, EasyJet streamlined its operations, continuing their support for Gatwick services and Manchester Airport. There has been a 10% decline in air passenger numbers, something I am not sure I will hear from Members opposite, but I am not concerned.

1135 As hotel occupancy and other tourism-related figures are up, it might mean that less people may be flying to Gibraltar, but of those landing here, more are staying here, as evidenced in the increase in overnight hotel stays. There were 3,628 aircraft movements in 2024, with strong load factors indicating that flight schedules were well aligned with demand, demonstrating operational efficiency. In the summer of 2025, Gibraltar will 1140 benefit from a robust schedule of 34 weekly flights at peak.

The new year-round Birmingham service operated by EasyJet is a particularly welcome addition. This route reconnects Gibraltar with the UK's Midlands, a populous area with a strong interest in this destination. It is expected to boost tourism, foster business connections and contribute to broader economic growth.

1145 Winter 2025 is expected to maintain similar frequencies, even though I was communicated this morning that we are seeing an additional three flights per week. Winter 2025 is expected to increase its frequency, including Birmingham. Medium-term prospects may be shaped by ongoing EU negotiations, but the long-term outlook remains optimistic, with access to new opportunities.

1150 Gibraltar's position outside the EU presents clear advantages for UK-based travellers and airlines, including shared language and currency, lower airport fees and marketing initiatives. In terms of infrastructure, we are continuing to invest in modernisation and operational efficiency. Key upgrades include two self-propelled luggage belt loaders and an air-start unit, all aimed at improving efficiency, reducing delays and enhancing safety.

Enhanced security screening technology to improve detection, speed and passenger experience. Further improvements are planned, including the replacement of airside and landside paving, IT and CCTV upgrades and washroom refurbishments. Staff training remains a priority, and over the past year all mandatory training was completed, along with specialised programmes on emergency response, drone threats and participation in a night-time air disaster exercise. These efforts ensure staff readiness for routine and critical scenarios alike.

Gibraltar's air terminal has made significant progress in resilience, route development, infrastructure and training, and this reflects a strategy focused not merely on recovery, but on long-term advancement and global connectivity. Madam Speaker, I now turn to my tourism portfolio.

As the hon. Members will appreciate, tourism forms a vital pillar of Gibraltar's economic landscape, contributing approximately 20% to our GDP. In 2024, tourist expenditure has increased over the year by 7.1% to £276.35 million, with the overall number of visitor arrivals, excluding the frontier workers, increasing in the same period by 3.9%. The number of coaches arriving in Gibraltar has increased by 9.7%. Madam Speaker, it is my absolute pleasure to report these positive increases across the board.

The tourism sector is not just about economics. It is a cornerstone of Gibraltar's vibrant atmosphere, and it is how we present the Rock to the world.

Madam Speaker, the Cruise Sector remains an integral part of Gibraltar's tourism, supporting port operations, retail, food and beverage, tour operators and tourist sites. In 2024, we saw a 10% increase with 185 cruise calls. For 2025, a further 30% rise is expected, bringing us close to record numbers. Based on current bookings, we anticipate continued double-digit growth in 2026, likely surpassing all previous records.

Beyond the immediate tourism impact, cruise visits provide excellent exposure. Many passengers get a brief taste of Gibraltar and may return for longer, independent stays. Madam Speaker, to promote this sector, we will work closely with the Cruise Lines International Association, CLIA, the world's largest cruise trade body, representing 95% of global cruise capacity, 54,000 travel agents and 15,000 agencies. To reaffirm our commitment and relationship, in May, we hosted the Cruise Leaders' Dinner at the CLIA Conference in Southampton for the third consecutive year. The Gibraltar Tourist Board team engaged with industry professionals during the conference and Expo. In September, we hosted the Clear Destination Showcase in Gibraltar. Sixty members visited for a two-day programme highlighting Gibraltar's port services.

This was a valuable opportunity to promote Gibraltar's assets as a cruise destination to the key decision-makers in the industry. And the Gibraltar Tourist Board participated in three major Mediterranean-focused events. The 64th MedCruise General Assembly in Tarragona in June 24, Sea Trade Europe in Malaga in September, and the International Cruise Summit, one of Gibraltar's top cruise conferences in November.

These engagements enhanced Gibraltar's visibility and reinforced our position as a must-visit destination. Madam Speaker, in April 2025, Channel 5 aired The Cruise Fun at Sea, a one-hour programme focused on Gibraltar as a featured stop, providing excellent exposure of a destination. We also attended the Sea Trade Cruise Summit in Miami, a key industry event bringing together global leaders, including CEOs and Senior Executives.

I am pleased to report feedback on Gibraltar remains positive and we remain committed to building on this momentum. Madam Speaker, we continue working to ensure Gibraltar remains visible and relevant in the leisure travel sector. In July 2024, the

Gibraltar Tourist Board supported Travel Trade Gazette, the TTG, a leading trade publication covering the travel industry during its annual Diversity and Inclusion Day, part of Fairer Travel Week.

1205 This placed Gibraltar's branding in front of key industry decision-makers as a strong advocate for DEI in the workplace. I addressed an audience of industry leaders on our sustainable tourism targets and future growth plans at the Travel Weekly Future of Travel Conference at Google Headquarters in London in September, where I shared the stage with respected speakers from Jet2 Holidays, EasyJet Holidays, Love Holidays and Sunday  
1210 Times political editor Tim Shipman. This was the third time Gibraltar has spoken at this event and shows we are considered a valued participant.

Madam Speaker, the Gibraltar Tourist Board continues to showcase Gibraltar as a first-class destination at every viable opportunity. We exhibited at the World Travel Market (WTM) in London in November, one of the world's most influential tourism events. Our  
1215 annual participation is a key part of our marketing strategy.

WTM gives Gibraltar major exposure to around 40,000 travel professionals and 250,000 online members. Our team held valuable meetings with top names including EasyJet and British Airways. I was also interviewed by Online Travel Training, a global leader in multilingual travel trade training with 95,000 registered professionals, offering  
1220 further international reach for our destination messaging.

Madam Speaker, I also attended the annual Travel Weekly Sustainability Summit in London, hosted by Google, which took place against the backdrop of COP29 in November 2024. I sat on a panel discussion where I was able to contribute to the overarching discussion around sustainability in destinations, highlighting case studies of infrastructure  
1225 development. Sustainability is discussed and debated in very most tourism-related conferences, as it is at the heart of all future planning.

It is therefore vital that Gibraltar continues to promote the commitment and progress it is making in these areas. Madam Speaker, the Gibraltar Tourist Board hosted the annual Travel Weekly Industry Leaders Dinner in partnership with Deloitte in February 2025,  
1230 where I, together with CEO of Gibraltar Tourist Board, were invited to provide a welcome address. The event each year marks the launch of the Travel Weekly Deloitte Insight Report, which looks at the trading conditions and market trends for the year ahead.

Madam Speaker, throughout the year, the Gibraltar Tourist Board collaborates with travel trade media, of which the largest industry title is Travel Weekly. In January, the features team headed to Gibraltar to research news and content for a 16-page  
1235 supplement magazine which covered all aspects of Gibraltar's tourism product, together with future projects. The supplement is available in print, which reaches 45,000 readers, and over 77,000 readers on its digital formats. Travel Weekly's core readership ranges from front-line travel sellers and suppliers to the Chief Executives of the world's leading  
1240 travel firms.

The GTB participated in the Travel Bulletin Mediterranean Showcase in Stratford-upon-Avon, attended by 50 agents in the Midlands catchment area. Falling in the first week of the EasyJet Birmingham inaugural service, agents were fully briefed on this new service.

Sunborn Gibraltar and the Gibraltar Tourist Board hosted a familiarisation trip in June 2025, welcoming UK-based personnel and executive assistants from medium to large  
1245 companies. The goal was to reintroduce Gibraltar as a destination for corporate events, incentives and executive travel, showcasing its potential to attract future business. The Association for Independent Tour Operators (AITO), was hosted by the GTB for its fourth

agents conference last month for 38 UK-based travel agents and tour operators, exclusively trade-facing specialists and niche market professionals.

The organisers were taken aback by the enthusiasm shown by the agents. Gibraltar was actually featured in the front cover of Travel Weekly magazine to the readership of over 114,000 people. The working trip was designed to showcase The Rock as a destination while informing agents on the product to assist them in promoting it to their customers.

We have been informed by both BA Holidays and EasyJet Holidays that the statistics on their package holiday reservations to Gibraltar for the summer are up significantly from last year, and they were already great last year. In addition, it is encouraging to see that the publication of the British Airways Holidays 2025 Travel Trends Report identified Gibraltar as a rising star destination based on holiday package searches on their website this January, which are up 17% in January 2025 compared to the same period last year. January being one of the main booking periods, which usually sees searches transferring to booking.

Recently, Gibraltar was also added to EasyJet Holidays alternative destinations, which highlights how Gibraltar is being noticed within the industry. Madam Speaker, in March, the Minister, Professor John Cortes and I met with the President and representatives of the *Agencias de Viajes Asociadas de Andalucía* (AEDAP), a network representing over 85 travel agencies, some of which organise coach tours to Gibraltar for clients across Europe. I used my Spanish radio-presenting broadcasting voice there, did you see?

I replaced Norma, so yes, I'm very proud to be compared to, Norma Delgado. The meeting was a good chance to update tour operators in the region of Gibraltar's latest improvements to its many tourist products and the other projects currently under development. It was also an opportunity to discuss further collaboration to increase the number of visitors as we consequently hosted 27 members of the Association in April.

They were given an extensive guided tour of key attractions so they could gain first-hand insight into Gibraltar's evolving tourism offerings. Madam Speaker, we are continuing our marketing campaign with TUI, whereby every TUI customer using their buses in the Costa del Sol and Costa de la Luz will be exposed to Gibraltar ads during the transfers and excursions, providing great awareness and encouraging visitation.

Madam Speaker, in continuation of my Colleague Minister Cortes visit to Morocco in December, the GTB attended a regional conference on tourism in Tangier, Tétouan, and the Hoceïma region in Tétouan.

Gibraltar was represented by the CEO Mr. Kevin Bossino as the only foreign destination in attendance, and it was a unique forum to raise awareness, make new contacts, and explore the very interesting symbiotic potential that exists between both countries. GTB CEO Mr. Bossino met up with senior members of the Moroccan Government, tourism executives, Chamber of Commerce, and related businesses.

Madam Speaker, it is also exciting to see the development of new iconic tourist sites on the Rock, one of which is the fully renovated World War II Tunnel, and so many other sites such as the Northern Defences, Moorish Castle, and the Mount, as already mentioned by my colleagues the Hon. Deputy Chief Minister and the Hon. Professor John Cortes. I would like to thank them both for delivering these incredible new sites, which will continue and enhance the tourism experience.

Madam Speaker, in addition, on behalf of Trinity House UK, we opened an expression of interest in order to open the Lighthouse for tours. Ours is the only Trinity Lighthouse

outside the UK islands, and made even more special due to its location at one of the southernmost points in Europe. I am sure this will be a successful venue for whoever the successful bidder is.

1300 Madam Speaker, the Gibraltar Tourist Board attended the London chapter of the International Media Marketplace (IMM) London. The event is the largest networking event in the UK for travel industry writers, editors, bloggers, and content creators, with over 500 media and public relations professionals in attendance.

1305 Taking place across two days, the marketplace allows exhibitors to pitch new stories, whilst the journalists and creators look for story angles to target editorial commissions and press trips. This event forms part of the Tourist Board's annual planning agenda for attracting media to Gibraltar throughout the year, as the event provides an opportunity to update press on new product, events, and services, all to reinforce Gibraltar's culture and identity. The travel editor of the Sun newspaper, the UK's largest readership, commissioned a feature on the destination, sending a journalist to Gibraltar in April, with  
1310 a very positive feature published in June.

As part of our rebranding of Visit Gibraltar, we launched the Weather Med Begins TV advertising campaign, that aired across most major UK channels, reaching 5.5 million adults between April and May 2024, and 7.7 million adults between December 2024 and January 2025, with an additional 5.7 million adults in our latest TV campaign in April 2024.  
1315 No doubt the Opposition will try to downplay these numbers and demean the success of the campaign, but to use my new mantra, let them. In addition, our successful campaign was supported by print and digital newspaper ads, as well as radio spots and featuring the tagline, Weather Med Begins.

1320 Madam Speaker, if you follow the Visit Gibraltar social media pages, I very much hope you do, but I know you do not have social media, so I know you probably do not follow these, but I hope that someone tells you that our social media strategy has also been revamped. It is now more personalised, giving viewers a sample of what their experience will be, which is the more engaging way of speaking of sparking interest in the Rock as a destination. The interest is definitely showing as documented in the latest hotel  
1325 occupancy survey.

Room occupancy rates, guest nights sold and average length of stay per person have all increased. I am thrilled with these upward trends, which pointedly demonstrate that what we are doing in terms of marketing and exposure are evolving and our products are working. I would be interested to see how the Opposition will try to massage these figures  
1330 to give a negative impression of the success we are having in tourism.

Madam Speaker, short-term nets have been growing exponentially in the last few years, adding to the available accommodation offering. Whilst this is a phenomenon which has taken place in most jurisdictions, there is no global unified approach to deal with this. So, in order to be able to provide some clarity in terms of supply, availability and  
1335 type of accommodation on offer and to provide a platform to formalise this sector, a new bill was introduced on 18 December to regularise the offering and balance tourism growth with regulatory compliance.

There is a need for regulations to be in place to ensure there is a visibility of usage and so that property owners are accountable for the service they are providing and charging  
1340 for. Madam Speaker, it is our desire to position Gibraltar as a bespoke destination for the boutique MICE – Meetings, Incentives, Conventions and Exhibitions – sector, particularly

for the UK market. The Gibraltar Tourist Board partnered with Sunborn Gibraltar to participate in two specialist events aimed at conference and incentive travel planners.

1345 Both the MICE Book Expo and C&IT Forum are UK-focused networking events that provide opportunities for destinations and partner venues to engage in buyer-driven appointments over two days. In a competitive marketplace, Gibraltar is steadily increasing its visibility among buyers by highlighting its unique selling points. As part of this strategy, the Rocks tourism product was placed under the spotlight during the UK Business Travel Association's BTA Autumn Conference held at the Sunborn in September.

1350 Networking, discussion and debate were at the forefront of the conference with some 190 delegates given the opportunity to explore first-hand what Gibraltar has to offer. This was an important event to bring to Gibraltar as the association is made up of travel management companies, the TMCs, and the BTA's members account for over 90% of the UK expenditure on managed business travel and is responsible for over 90% of corporate  
1355 bookings. The Gibraltar Tourist Board met the BTA at the Meetings and Incentives show in London in June 2023, which led to the event taking place for the first time in Gibraltar.

The area of sports-led tourism is also an important avenue to pursue. A good example of this is the case with private individuals' cooperation in the 8th Gibraltar Backgammon Championship which recently took place at the Sunborn Hotel. There were 96 players  
1360 from 28 countries participating and engaging in five days of intensive competition, including some of the world's top talents such as current world champion Johan Moazed from Sweden.

It is fantastic to see Gibraltar hosting such prestigious events, placing the territory firmly on the map for international event circuits, with free publicity from their YouTube  
1365 thousands of YouTube viewers of the championships.

In September, we will also be hosting the prestigious Netball World Youth Cup Championship which is the pinnacle of netball competition for emerging players who are under 21 years of age. The tournament will take place in two main competition venues, the Tercentenary Sports Centre and Europa Sports Park.

1370 Twenty teams from across the globe, from as far-flung places as the Cook Islands, Malaysia, Zambia and New Zealand will compete in the event which is taking place from the 19th to the 20th of September. I would like to thank the Netball Association for organising such a great event for Gibraltar as it goes without saying that these types of events are of the utmost importance and in line with our strategy to market Gibraltar as  
1375 the place of choice for major sporting events. Other significant sports events taking place are in darts, boxing, squash and rugby sevens to name a few.

Visit Gibraltar attended the TCS London Marathon Running Show to highlight Gibraltar as a premier sports tourism destination and launch the Gibraltar Under Siege Run, a new endurance challenge inspired by the Rock's historic resilience due to take place next  
1380 February. The event allowed direct engagement with the global running community successfully raising awareness of the destination. I would like to thank all the organisers as well as the Minister for Sport and his team at the GSLA for their continued collaboration.

The GTB once again exhibited at the Meeting Show in London. The specialist exhibition  
1385 has helped Gibraltar raise its profile in this sector post-2020, supported by Sunborn Gibraltar and has directly contributed to winning conference business for Gibraltar. Madam Speaker, the world of literature was treated to the GIBUNCO Gibraltar Literary

Festival in November 2024, a combined effort led by the Gibraltar Tourist Board in collaboration with the Gibraltar Cultural Services.

1390 As has become expected, the festival continues to attract a high calibre of authors from  
all walks of life and varied experiences from sports to entertainment to politics and  
personal challenges. The keynote speaker last year was the ever-popular Shirley Ballas of  
Strictly Come Dancing fame who gave audiences an insight into her personal and  
1395 professional life. We also welcomed Sir Liam Fox, who amongst other distinguished roles  
was the UK Secretary of State for Defence between 2010 and 2011, Lord Graham Brady,  
Conservative Member of Parliament and for 14 years the Chairman of the 1922  
Committee, and Guillem Balagué of the International Football World who had covered the  
likes of Lionel Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo.

1400 The festival also provided writing workshops, food demonstrations, school talks and  
interactive programmes, press write-ups and more. I for one am certainly looking ahead  
to this November for the 2025 festival and what it will no doubt offer.

Madam Speaker, we are continuing Gibraltar's long-standing working relationship with  
the prestigious Oxford Literary Festival. In March I attended the event to present the  
Gibraltar Talk where I was able to talk about our festival and about Gibraltar as a  
1405 destination to all the festival goers.

Madam Speaker, the Go Diving Show 2025 held in March at NAEC Stoneleigh Park in  
Coventry, UK attracted 12,543 visitors and featured around 100 exhibitors. As the UK's  
premier scuba diving event, it offered a blend of education, inspiration and interactive  
activities. The Gibraltar Tourist Board, alongside Dive Charters Gibraltar, participated in  
1410 the show which also featured Gibraltar on the front cover of Scuba Diver magazine with a  
seven-page feature boosting the destination's credibility and exposure. Gibraltar was also  
recently featured in another one-hour Channel 5 programme as part of the Jewels of the  
Mediterranean series in February 2025. This opportunity was secured following  
continuous efforts by the Gibraltar Tourist Board.

1415 The broadcast provided substantial exposure leading to a boost in business including a  
notable increase in wedding enquiries at the Sunborn Hotel and scuba diving enquiries,  
all of which featured in the programme. The Gibraltar Tourist Board participated in the  
Connect Route Conference held in Girona, Spain in February which brought together 800  
attendees including representatives from 200 airports across 63 countries. It was a  
1420 valuable opportunity to network with existing airline partners, stay informed about  
industry trends and explore potential new routes, especially with an agreement now in  
place.

EasyJet launched their new route to Birmingham on 1 June. This has been a route which  
we have been actively pursuing and is already proven popular, operating twice weekly all  
1425 year round. The GTB travelled to the Midlands in March 2025 to support the new summer  
route in conjunction with EasyJet at an event co-hosted with Trade Title Travel Bulletin.

35 travel agents joined the evening which was reinforced on the night by Gibraltar's  
trade suppliers EasyJet Holidays, Blands, Dive Charters, MH Blands, Sunborn Gibraltar and  
WW2 Tunnels, all of whom I would like to thank wholeheartedly for their support in this  
1430 initiative. Also attending was disability specialist operator Enable Holidays. In March we  
hosted the ESG Senior Lead from EasyJet Holidays, one of the UK's leading tour operators  
featuring four Gibraltar hotels.

The visit highlighted Gibraltar's commitment to sustainability through strong public-  
private collaboration, education and community engagement, demonstrating our



1435 alignment with climate goals and values increasingly sought by major travel brands. Madam Speaker, I have little doubt that the Shadow Minister for Tourism or even the *de facto* Minister for Tourism will respond to this address with the familiar claims that we have no strategy, that we are failing and that there is a lack of maintenance across the tourism infrastructure. I want to be abundantly clear.

1440 Those criticisms are not grounded in fact. Our record and statistics tell the true story. Our strategy indeed exists, as stated in our most recent Parliament session. It was finalised over 12 months ago and we have been actively working with it since. It has not been published as we were awaiting the outcome of the deal, as the result of this would determine two distinct strategic pathways. We are now clear on which direction we will  
1445 be taking and it will be published soon.

The Strategy is dynamic, evidence-led and aligned with our long-term goals for the good of Gibraltar. It is also a working document which will be amended as and when circumstances change. It focusses on enhancing our visibility in competitive global markets, strengthening our cruise, leisure, MICE and sports tourism sectors, expanding  
1450 our events calendar and investing in both heritage and infrastructure.

Madam Speaker, Gibraltar is seeing consistent growth in cruise calls, increased bookings in the leisure sector, successful engagement with key players in aviation, diving and MICE tourism and unprecedented international exposure through media campaigns and strategic partnerships. Visit Gibraltar reached over 3.8 million video views and 71,000  
1455 interactions across Facebook and Instagram just in the first half of this year, with engagement growth up by 1,500%. A marked effort to enhance social media presence this year has paid off.

Nearly all growth came organically, with 95% of Instagram and 91% of Facebook watch time unpaid, reflecting high content quality and strategic effectiveness. Industry feedback  
1460 is positive, new routes have been secured and Gibraltar is being noticed for all the right reasons. Facts speak louder than rhetoric.

From the restoration of the World War II tunnels, to the ongoing work at the Mount, to the repurposing of Heritage Sites and the careful management of our Nature Reserve, we are delivering a tourism product of world-class standard, one that preserves our past and invests in our future. We are not complacent, we are ambitious. Gibraltar deserves  
1465 nothing less and we will continue working with energy, purpose and vision and an indefatigable passion for Gibraltar and its people.

On this side of the House, we often get accused by that side of the House of focussing and turning everything into a photo opportunity. As the Government of Gibraltar, which  
1470 the people so wisely Elected, a photo is a way to let the community know how we are investing taxpayers' money, how we are fulfilling our manifesto commitments, how we support the community's initiatives and give them more visibility and how we are working for them. Tell me, why do members opposite post photos in every raffle and cake stall around Gibraltar?

1475 Are these not considered photo opportunities? Are our photos opportunistic and yours are caring? Do we not care as much as you when we attend the same cake stalls and raffles?

Because I can tell you, we do. In the same way, we do when using a photo to announce something that we work hard to achieve for the benefit of the whole of Gibraltar and not  
1480 just ourselves.

So, while Opposition is wasting time creating IKEA cataloguing for graphics of quotes from the Budget speeches, we shall continue working to get the job done.

Madam Speaker, as I draw this Budget speech to a close, I do so with immense pride in the work my teams have done this year. I want our work to be visible, transparent and accessible to the public. With this at the fore, we launched an independent Ministry website, meect.gov.gi, check it out, it's really good, in January, designed to centralise access to information and improve public engagement. It is a one-stop shop for the latest information, resources, forms and updates relating to my Ministry's activities. This new platform shows what we are focused on, from ensuring equality in policy and representation to creating real employment pathways for all Gibraltarians, from championing youth engagement to investing in our cultural identity and our global presence. My focus is person-centred, forward-thinking and ambitious.

This Government has demonstrated that progress is not confined to any single sector. It is found in the hard work of an apprentice completing their first trade placement, in the voice of a young person standing confidently at a youth symposium and in the work by individuals going through a recovery programme at Bruce's Farm. It is in the rising number of cruise passengers walking down Main Street and in the applause heard at candlelight concerts, a drama festival or a World Book Day celebration.

We have embraced the reality that success is measured not only in economic figures but in human outcomes. That infrastructure must serve people, that legislation must empower them and that opportunity must reach those who need it the most. The figures we report on, be it a 96% drop in unemployment since 2011, a 283% rise in supported employment, training and participation or an 8.9% rise in young people engaging in youth clubs, each number represents lives impacted. Whether through our internationally recognised tourism campaigns, the transformation of the Gibraltar Training Centre, our development of the Youth Strategy or our pioneering work on LGBTQ+ protections and gender equality, we have kept one principle at the heart of all we do. That Gibraltar is all about its people and each one must have the opportunity to thrive. Madam Speaker, in every portfolio I lead – Equality, Employment, Culture, Tourism and Youth – I see a fantastic team of people who make my Ministries flourish.

My team at Employment, led by Debbie Garcia, my team at GCS, led by Seamus Byrne, my team at the GTB, led by Kevin Bossino and Suyenne Perez Catania, my team at the Youth Service, led by Mark Zammit, my team at Training and Apprenticeships, led by Dylan Podesta, my team at the Gibraltar Airport, led by Terence Lopez, my team at Bruce's Farm, led by Carlos Banderas, my team at the SNDO, led by Jenny Victory, and finally, my outstanding team in Equality and the Ministry of Employment, Equality, Culture, Tourism and Youth, led by April Smart Devincenzi. I must thank them all for supporting my ideas and working tirelessly with me to implement the changes I want to make in order to make my community that much better. I must make a special mention to my team of PAs of the Ministry, especially Nicole Cartwright and Monica Stevens, who are the ones who deal with me on a daily basis, who understand me – which is not easy – and make my life easier every day.

Thanks for understanding that there is always a method to my madness. Together, we are building a Gibraltar that doesn't leave anyone behind, and I commit myself to continuing this work with the same resolve and belief that has brought us this far. Now, I'll have a sip of a drink.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Well, Madam Speaker, after that magnificent performance, and conscious of the words of the Hon. Minister about human outcomes, and to permit those who may be watching to have a comfort break as much as those who may be sat in this Chamber, I wonder whether we might recess for 15 minutes until quarter-past six before we hear the next of our peers speak.

**Madam Speaker:** All right, we will recess until quarter-past six.

*The House recessed at 5.56 p.m. and resumed at 6.17 p.m.*

**Madam Speaker:** Yes, the Hon. Giovanni Origo.

**Hon. G Origo:** Thank you. Madam Speaker, hon. Colleagues and hon. Members opposite, and to those listening or watching, it is an absolute privilege once again to rise and to deliver my second ever Budget Address. This year, my contribution would cover Youth, Tourism, the Environment and Transport.

But before I start, it is important to take a moment and to express my sincerest gratitude to the Parliamentary team. This year, we have you to thank for the prompt turnaround of Hansard, a task which is by no means easy to do, not least given the amount of hours that we often spend here.

Turning to my address, it is worth noting that last year, the Hon. Chief Minister had complimented my contribution to the Budget debate, stating that it was the most elegant speech given from this side of the House.

My criticisms were both calculated and constructive, and for that I wish to publicly thank him for his praise. This year, I will hope to do my best to repeat that performance. I hope that the Hon. Chief Minister, along with his Cabinet Ministers from the Government that he leads, at least for now, find it as elegant as he did on the last occasion.

However, in terms of being constructive, this has been nothing short of challenging, often even impossible to do. As I will discuss throughout my address, there are many concerns which have been raised by my Colleagues and myself, which appear to have fallen on deaf ears. One then wonders; what is the point of being so constructive, if the Government then fails to capitalise on those suggestions and ignore our goodwill?

With any luck, and I say luck, we shall not have a recurrence of such failings in what remains in the second half of their term in Government. But that just might be the optimist in me that is speaking. Of course, we shall wait and see.

For the first part of my contribution, and as the youngest Member of this House, it would be remiss of me not to start my address with a discussion of our young people. It is often said that the true measure of a country's future is how it treats its young people. If that is the standard by which we are to judge this Government, then I regret to say that we are failing our youth and failing them badly.

I came across a wonderful phrase the other day, in the hearts of every young person lies the potential for greatness. Madam Speaker, I fear that this Government is not only destroying their potential but also breaking their hearts. If I may just remind Members, last year I stood here and made a heartfelt plea, a plea to take our young people seriously.

I spoke of the lack of enthusiasm, lack of engagement, and lack of opportunities, and lack of investment in their potential. A year later, I regret to say that very little has

1575 changed. We are moving backwards, not forwards. And for clarification, this is not the  
direction which we should be moving in. Whilst there have been some initiatives by name,  
and I repeat, by name alone, the fundamental issues remain largely unaddressed. Today,  
the reality for young people is clear. There is a growing sense that their aspirations are  
not matched by the policies of those in power. If I may speak plainly, the Youth Services  
1580 are unsatisfactory, underfunded, undervalued, and underperforming.

We often see this Government make political U-turns, some of which we welcome.  
However, all these U's which I have just described are undesirable, and certainly  
unpleasant for me to point out yet again. Our youth clubs, which should serve as hubs of  
growth, education, and support, are being run on a shoestring Budget. They lack the  
1585 resources to provide consistent programming and professional mentorship.

We cannot simply keep them open in name alone. Youth Services must be equipped to  
mean something in the lives of young people that they serve. The Minister has of course  
tried to persuade us and say otherwise, but the proof is in the pudding, and I am sorry to  
say that this pudding has a bitter and sour taste.

1590 With that said, we patiently wait for the long-awaited improvements to our Youth  
Clubs. It is regrettable, but notable, that the refurbishments of both the Laguna and Plater  
Youth Clubs remain outstanding. Both projects have been the subject of a long and  
tedious DPC approval process, meaning that our young people are to eagerly await for the  
first brick to be laid and for their promised investment to materialise.

1595 Madam Speaker, this comes to no surprise, at least not to me. Especially when £38  
million later and having originally been planned for completion in May-June of 2023, the  
Rooke Elderly Home still has not received a certificate of fitness. With any luck, within the  
coming year, and given that I could see quoted in the Estimates book a figure of £15,000  
dedicated to youth club refurbishments, perhaps we may see usage go from what the  
1600 Minister has described before as negligible to one which is meaningful -Those are his  
words, not mine.

In my view, a manifesto pledge often known as a commitment, and more often  
described as a contract with the Electorate, is something to take seriously. However, it is  
clear that the GSLP Liberal Party Manifesto, not the Government Manifesto, is a document  
1605 aimed only for their own political gain.

It is most unfortunate that this Government has become too comfortable with  
backtracking on their promises. So I ask, what? What is a Minister going to tell the 500  
youth who attended youth clubs in 2024 when he explains to them that the Rooke Youth  
Club is not going ahead?

1610 It is unfortunate that they will not see the light of day in the Government's  
commitment to them to provide a new centralised Youth Centre. The construction of this  
project is not even mentioned within the plan submitted to the DPC. They sold this as a  
central hub that would cater for all Gibraltar's youth.

But the only thing this Government caters for is votes on the false promises to win an  
1615 Election by 150 swing in ballots. As the Hon. Chief Minister said in this Chamber not so  
long ago, if the Government think they are doing enough for youth, they must be secretly  
laughing, like the turkeys that voted for Christmas. It therefore appears that this is indeed  
another of their many U-turns, Madam Speaker, and one which on this occasion is not  
welcomed.

1620 We are getting used to the Minister headlining project launches with subsequent photo  
opportunities, social media posts and good publicity. I want to believe that they are being

done with noble intentions – to genuinely improve Youth Services. The truth on the ground tells a different story.

1625 It is a sad and sorry state of affairs. We continue to hear soundbites as opposed to outcomes. What we certainly don't see is a Government treating youth as a priority.

The goodwill of the young people is running out and their patience has limits. They want to believe in Gibraltar. They want to participate in building its future.

1630 But we must give them the tools to do so before the damage is irreversible. You may be asking, but what do these tools look like? In my view, we must provide meaningful and sustained funding for youth groups and not just token grants.

We must provide career advice services that function all year round, not just once a year. We must provide proper vocational pathways that lead to real jobs and not waiting rooms. We want to see Youth Centres open during the evenings and weekends, not just on the occasional two-hour only windows.

1635 We require a cultural shift, one that values youth voices not only during Elections but every single day. This is a small community with massive potential. We should be a model to the rest of the world on youth engagement and opportunities.

1640 But we cannot fool the young people of Gibraltar any longer. We cannot expect them to believe that the appropriate funding and initiatives will develop based on press releases and photo opportunities alone. Last year I said that our youth were the heartbeat of Gibraltar.

1645 This year I say that unless we act boldly and decisively, we risk flatlining their future. But when the GSD get into Government, we will promise and commit that we will resuscitate the non-beating heart and restore the pulse of our nation. Ensuring priority, funding and care are provided to our youth.

1650 A pulse which will beat stronger and build a better future for Gibraltar that we can all be proud of. You may be questioning why I am so passionate about all this. All you need to do is to ask the young people themselves. They will tell you that they feel invisible. The opportunities for employment and advancement remain slim. It is a growing issue and many young Gibraltarians are either leaving to seek opportunities elsewhere or worse, falling through the cracks entirely.

We cannot continue to haemorrhage their future in this way. So, let's turn to the numbers, which I know the Minister doesn't like to hear. Last year we spent less than £660,000 on Youth Services.

1655 That figure has barely moved, with expenditure having gone up to £683,000 for this coming year. An improvement, one might think. But how naive was I, almost falling for that trap?

1660 Shockingly, the contributing factor to this increase is a rise in wages, not investment into refurbishment and not investment in our young people. When compared to the millions of pounds poured into refuse collection, it is painfully clear. We invest more in bins than we do our young people.

It is no wonder then, Madam Speaker, that our youth are disengaged, that they don't see a future here. Because what exactly are they being offered? The Zone, Step Up and Thrive project is still running on 90 minutes a week.

1665 We said it last year and we say it again now. How can anyone seriously claim to support needs, those not in Education, Employment or Training, when their drop-in service to help them lasts for less time than a football match? Madam Speaker, this is not a beacon of hope.

1670 It is a flicker of light. A flicker like the one we often used to see before a power cut. And let us hope, and not the beacon type, that our youth do not suffer the blackouts that we are so used to from our electrical authority.

1675 This is not just my opinion. It is based on facts. Since questions were last asked in Parliament, a mere 39 young people have used the services to date, 11 of which made use of the service over the last nine months, averaging just over one person every month this last calendar year.

1680 It is indeed regrettable that despite highlighting the importance of surveying the target group of needs, we have yet to be provided with statistics in this regard and therefore we are unable to assess the usefulness of this project. It is crucial in our view to be able to properly plan and to provide such an initiative with the resources it needs to have a better understanding of the target group that we are aiming to serve. That is, if we are genuinely aiming to provide beacons of hope and not just flickers of light.

You could therefore ask, are these initiatives simply about ticking a box? Because I do not see hunger for positive change. I do not see intent to prioritise our youth.

1685 I do not see a commitment to engage, to consult and to improve. What I do see is a Government that goes to the motions without substance, one that announces projects to deflect criticisms and appear worthy of re-Election, rather than making real change and transform the lives of young people. But we do have events, Madam Speaker, which are commendable, such as the Youth Symposium.

1690 However, it remains sporadic and insufficient. It does not constitute a comprehensive strategy to engage our youth all year round. Overall, despite the minimal efforts made and the financial commitment to our youth, it remains inadequate.

1695 It operates on an empty tank and limited resources, which has a direct impact on our ability to deliver consistent and comprehensive support to our young people. The Government's expenditure on Youth Services pales in comparison to other sectors, reflecting what I would call a misalignment of their priorities. So, let's talk about employment.

1700 We all know how hard the transition from education to employment can be. It remains a significant challenge for young people. So, I welcome initiatives such as the Connect Hub, which aims to provide much needed guidance and engagement between young people and professionals in the financial sector.

However, the stark and unfortunate reality is that the aims do not meet expectations. Their intended goals do not meet their intended outcomes. The feedback I get is that young people are unaware of what it does, who to access it, and who exactly it is for.

1705 I am afraid that this programme has not developed and matured in the way that it should, and it is very much still in its infancy. Announced on 15 November 2023, we heard yesterday that there were only seven workshops being held to date. Just seven workshops in twenty months.

1710 It clearly lacks the reach, and the depth required to make a substantial and meaningful impact. I really do sound like a broken record, Madam Speaker. I hope this House believes me when I say I want nothing more than our youth members to be thriving and look forward to investing in their future.

1715 Instead, I feel that they are approaching a dead end. Which brings me quite nicely to the Careers Fair, an initiative that I welcome the prospect of its return and was finally held on 28 November 2024. It was open to the public, and its aim was to provide a meaningful experience, and to promote various career pathways, and to guide our youth on exploring

different avenues, with a view of ensuring that the right career choice, at such a critical time in their lives, is taken.

1720 However, it is one thing, Madam Speaker, to make announcements of a questionable success story. It is another thing entirely to deliver. And delivery, Madam Speaker, is where this Government have consistently fallen short.

Instead, the Careers Fair raised many concerns, and ultimately feelings of disappointment. It lacked depth. Our youth left with more questions than they did answers.

1725 So, I urge that the Government next year do not repeat what I would call this Mickey Mouse format. And so, the cycle continues. Young people leave school and fall into a void, often lost and disappointed with their choices, wishing they had been given more information and better advice, before embarking into the depths of their despair.

1730 It is clear that there is no structured transition, and more importantly, no tailored guidance. Many will end up in unemployment, or in the revolving door of Government placement, with no stability and no prospect of building a meaningful career. So, what happens next?

1735 Let us turn our attention to a topic which is too often dismissed, but nevertheless still whispered about in the cafes and in the other public places. We hear rumblings of increases in crime, antisocial behaviour and even substance misuse. Things are getting out of control, we are told.

But this is not a coincidence. Because when our young people are given no viable outlets for expression, creativity or ambition, when they are excluded from the economic engine and deprived of engagement, they turn inward, or worse, outward in destructive ways. We need to tackle the root of the problem, that is, the neglect of youth education.

1740 If we had good careers, paths, careers advice and progression opportunities, there would be no doubt in my mind that these problems would be less prevalent amongst our young people than they are today. As a Member of the Opposition, I must express my deepest concerns for the Government's complacency in addressing Gibraltar's growing youth drug problem. Ministers have spoken at length about the Drugs Advisory Council and the so-called cross-agency coordination.

1745 Yet since the programme's inception, very little action has followed. In the past 12 months alone, we have seen one token awareness campaign timed just for Christmas, with no sustained outreach, no structured school programmes and no consistent community engagement. Madam Speaker, drug campaigns, like dogs, are not just for Christmas.

1750 Back in 2019, the Chief Minister himself proudly chaired the first meeting of the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs, pledging urgent strategic action. He announced the creation of a dedicated team at No. 6 Convent Place, the development of a centralised drug database and meaningful community outreach.

1755 He rightly warned that drug misuse can destroy people's lives and called for smarter, coordinated efforts involving Educators, Healthcare professionals and the RGP. The Chief Minister, since having proudly chaired the Council in 2019, has passed on the responsibility to the Minister for Youth and with it, the momentum all but disappeared. The newly appointed Minister seems to think that a one-off festive awareness campaign is enough to tackle a crisis that is clearly escalating.

1760

These are his words, not mine. In his own Budget address last year, he confirmed that there was a staggering 40% increase in drug-related admissions. Yet, where is the urgency in their response?

1765 A single workshop here, a press release there and no consistent year-round strategy to educate, to prevent or to support our young people. Our young people, our families and our future deserve far more than empty rhetoric and one-off seasonal campaigns. And we know what happens when young people feel excluded from the social and economic life.

We see it reflected in the rising tide of youth crime. The most recent statistics available were concerning. 600 youth arrests over a three-year period.

1770 But it is this trend that is even more disturbing. Year after year, young people top. They top the list of the RGP's most arrested age groups.

These are not just statistics. These are lives. Young people turn into drugs, vandalism and petty theft, not out of malice but out of frustration and hopelessness.

1775 They are, in my view, reacting to a system that has neglected them. Which brings me to another glaring omission in the Government's Youth Policy. The complete abandonment of nightlife and safe recreational spaces.

Gibraltar has, quite frankly, no viable entertainment for young people. We are creating what appears to be a vacuum in our society. With no music venues, no late-night cafes and no youth-focused events or clubs, what are we offering our young people?

1780 Where are the policies, Madam Speaker, to create youth-orientated social activities, particularly on Friday nights and on the weekends? Where is the support for artistic development? Too many questions, Madam Speaker, with very little answers.

Madam Speaker, the youth of Gibraltar are more than just a demographic in our statistics.

1785 They are not a box to be ticked or a press release to be issued for political point scoring.

They are our future doctors, teachers, engineers, parents and leaders. While some initiatives undertaken are steps in the right direction, they are not sufficient in name alone. Our young people deserve more than occasional events and underfunded programmes.

1790 They deserve more than piecemeal policy and photo opportunities. I wholeheartedly hope that next year I am able to commend the Government for developing a comprehensive, well-funded strategy that provides continuous support, engagement and, more importantly, opportunities to our young people. This Budget was yet another opportunity to realign our priorities.

1795 It could have been the moment where Youth Services received the bold funding that they really needed. Regrettably, Madam Speaker, this seminal moment appears to have been missed. But let us be clear.

1800 We are not short on potential in Gibraltar. What we are short on is political will. We need to begin to truly value and invest in our young people, not just with words, but with action.

As it currently stands, this Government's legacy will not be one of progress, but of betrayal. One that would cast a malevolent shadow on those young people who were falsely promised a brighter future. We cannot speak of building a resilient Gibraltar without properly funding those very people who will inherit it.

1805 This requires a radical uplift in our youth Budget and not just token increases. We need a sustained and strategic investment in skills development and employment opportunities. Anything less is not just short-sighted.



It is negligent. Now that the Political Agreement on a future Treaty has been finally reached, it may be that a new chapter could open for Gibraltar, one that may bring prosperity and new opportunities. I urge that this Treaty is developed with our young people at its heart.

Because the value of any Treaty is not just in what it protects, but in what it empowers us to build. This may help us construct the kind of future our youth deserve. A future that is safe, secure, ambitious and worthy of their trust for the short, the medium and the long term. Moving swiftly now to tourism.

I am sure the Hon. Chief Minister would be pleased to hear that at this point I shall sit down and give way to my hon. Colleague Mr Bossino, one of my peers from this side of the House. Peer. P-E-E-R. Madam Speaker, I say that only in jest.

But jokes aside, maybe at the next viewpoint he can take my place and stand on my behalf, given he performed so diligently in the last programme. Because you see, we are collegiate on this side of the House and we have no problem in sharing the spotlight when the potential of the topics of discussion cuts across some of our portfolios. Just as much was admitted the other day by the Hon. Minister for the Environment on Tuesday when explained that whilst he is responsible for the tourist product under his environment and heritage portfolios, the Hon. Minister for Tourism deals with the marketing.

Perhaps the other Government Ministers could learn from this, given that they look as divided as ever, with not one, not two, but three potential candidates vying for leadership. Four, I am corrected, four. It is that kind of competition, Madam Speaker, that often destroys a Party, rather than bring it closer together.

We shall wait and see. Madam Speaker, I must once again reiterate an ongoing concern regarding the availability of tourism statistics. The data publicly provided throughout the year has been often lagging behind by many months, with significant delays in its record keeping.

I have asked for the reason for the delay numerous times, but in true GSLP liberal style, I am yet to receive a meaningful answer. This is an absolute lack of transparency. It is disheartening and alarming.

You may think that I am perhaps paranoid, but it may just be that they do not want scrutiny by Members of the Opposition, because you cannot mask raw data. You are unable to spin yourself out of it. Data is valuable and it gives us insight, which then allows us to be critical in the trends in tourism, in particular against the Government's own policies.

This persistent failing undermines our ability to effectively assess whether this year's Budget allocations truly represent a value for money for the taxpayer. In the spirit, therefore, of being constructive, I remind Members opposite of the importance of updating publicly available data, which would undoubtedly facilitate more informed and robust debate going forward, and not just provide a clear picture three days before a Budget debate in the form of a yearly report. Having finally addressed this glaring oversight, I now turn, despite relying on limited and outdated information, to the uncomfortable truth about our current state of affairs.

Visitor numbers to the Upper Rock Nature Reserve have yet to recover to pre-pandemic levels. Between 2016 and 2019, we saw over one million visits annually for three consecutive years. That momentum is gone, vanished.

Yet the Minister, since having learned how to cycle, continues to peddle the fiction of steady improvement. This is an optimism, Madam Speaker. It is misdirection.

1855 Despite repeated claims of growth, the sector remains stuck in a sluggish recovery, failing yet again to reach the benchmarks we had only just reached before the pandemic. Even more concerning, early data in 2025 paints a worrying picture. Only 31,000 visitors by the end of January represent a 5% drop to the same period last year. He can check the statistics himself.

1860 This isn't growth, Madam Speaker. It is regression. Tourism is not booming. It is not growing. It is limping. And no amount of spin can change that. Let's cut across the pleasantries and look at the facts. Let's stop pretending mediocrity is progress. Cruise passenger arrivals in 2024 totalled just over 300,000, which is well short of the 400,000 plus we consistently saw two years before the pandemic.

1865 That means we're still, and I can calculate it for you, 25% below of what we previously stood at. We're still dragging behind. And this is not recovery. It is stagnation. Because after all this time, a full recovery remains out of reach. Yes, the 2025 figures up to April show around 90,000 passenger arrivals. This is an improvement from last year. But let's not confuse better than last year with good enough. It simply means we're doing less badly than before. The bar should be full recovery, not slow-motion progress. As of now, the Gibraltar Port website has scheduled 236 cruise arrivals for 2025. That's seven shy of the all-time record set in 2018, which is now seven years ago.

A slow-motion recovery, indeed. While it is perhaps encouraging, it is hardly groundbreaking. A near return to form almost a decade later isn't a cause for celebration.

1875 So, whilst the Hon. Minister might want a round of applause, I say let's not pop the champagne just yet. Because the reality is that we are not ahead. We are not breaking records. We are still trying to catch up to them. Limping.

But let's put these numbers into context. Let's not spin them in this classic GSLP Liberal style. Yes, we have better numbers. But the jewel in the crown is what we do with these visitors and how we treat them.

1880 Madam Speaker, as I've stated in the past, the potential economic contribution of each cruise call to our local economy is considerable and should not be underestimated. Each arrival, along with the thousands of passengers disembarking, provides opportunity to generate tangible and immediate benefits to our catering, our hospitality and our retail sectors. But are we doing enough to impress our visitors?

Does the Minister genuinely believe that our Port entrance is up to standard? Or is it only good enough because he is the one responsible for letting it fall into this state? If he was sitting on this side of the house, I have no doubt he'd be tearing it apart.

1890 Quite frankly, if this is a welcome we are offering cruise passengers, we might as well hang a sign that says, lower your expectations. You're in Gibraltar now. Because Madam Speaker, it is disappointing that despite concerns raised last year, the cruise terminal remains in a state of neglect, offering a poor first impression to arriving visitors.

The port entrance on which these tourists embark from remains in shambles. To add salt to the wound, the journey from where they make towards the Town Centre is best described as navigating through a jungle with no clear signs, no beautification and no method to the madness. While there have been assurances of future investments in the port, which we very much welcome, little progress has been made.

1900 The Government's own manifesto admitted that the current cruise terminal is looking tired. But let's be honest, the only thing truly exhausted here is the public's patience. We were promised a state-of-the-art terminal, a magnificent facility that would set the benchmark for the region.

And yet not a single brick has been laid. The current condition not only undermines the appeal of Gibraltar as a destination of choice, but it also reflects a lack of urgency in addressing what is a long-standing issue.

1905 This isn't just about aesthetics. It's about pride, planning and economic sense. Gibraltar cannot afford to sell itself short at the very point of entry. If we truly believe that tourism is a pillar in our economy, then it must be treated as such in our investment priorities.

1910 Because just like with Youth Services, the neglect we see here is not due to a lack of means, but a lack of prioritisation. And until that changes, we will continue to fall short of the standards our visitors would rightly expect. At the same time, we must take a broader and more strategic view of our tourism offering if we are to increase the average spend per visitor.

1915 We must invest in elevating the overall quality of the product. This includes enhancing key attractions, diversifying experiences and ensuring that our cultural and heritage sites are compelling, accessible and well-maintained. But let us be clear. Enhancing our tourism product means very little if tourists cannot reach it. Quality must go hand in hand with accessibility. And just as much was stated within the latest Chamber of Commerce Tourism Manifesto in 2024. And whilst I understand the Hon. the Chief Minister doesn't often quote the Chamber, given that they don't very often agree, but I note earlier this week he must have quoted them at least twice during his address. So let me draw his attention to something else which they said.

1920 In their manifesto, they stated that, and I quote, The key to unlocking tourism's full potential is transport. The message is clear. What is unclear is whether this Government is even listening, let alone willing to act. This is not just disappointing. It is a red flag. These are warnings, repeated, clear and now impossible to ignore. The cruise industry is evolving at pace, and Gibraltar must evolve with it or risk being left behind.

1925 A compelling tourism strategy is urgently needed. One that is imaginative and capable of inspiring potential visitors. A bold strategy isn't a luxury. It's a necessity. Yet after a year of talk, we've seen nothing. No plan, no detail, no direction. Just vague assurances, shifting timelines and lateral moves of Senior Staff. Without a published strategy, there's no way to track progress, to constructively scrutinise or to hold anyone accountable.

1930 Back in October 2024, the minister for tourism assured this house that, and I quote, *"Of course we have a strategy. We have developed a tourism strategy which we will publish very soon."* This was over eight months ago, still nothing. And now last week and in October, when I asked him again in this house, he said the same tired line. It will be ready soon.

1935 Madam Speaker, after all this much delay, soon means nothing. And if the strategy lives only in the minister's mind, then it's not a strategy. It's a delusion. It's a fantasy and one which is effectively meaningless. But he said today that they might be soon publishing the strategy, so I await for its prompt publication.

1940 Which neatly brings me to my next observation, which involves one of our most prestigious offerings, the museum. Madam Speaker, while the Hon. Minister has previously claimed that the museum enjoys significant global recognition, citing its work on the Neanderthal World Heritage Site, its mention in a Netflix series and its inclusion in the newly launched alternative tour, the raw data tells a different story. Since those statements were made in September in 2024, we have instead seen an eight percent decline in visitor numbers, compounding an already downward trend.

But we heard on Monday that the museum receipts were up and that we should be proud of this achievement. We were told that receipts have gone up from £60,000 to £75,000, representing a 25 percent increase in revenue. Wow.

I almost just for one second fell for the spin. But how could I forget? The museum entry fees were increased last year by 200%, from a modest £5 entry to £15.

A 200% increase, Madam Speaker. But what we haven't seen is a 200% increase in revenue. And that is because the visitor numbers are down and our tourists are clearly not satisfied with the product.

It seems that once we are able to pull the wool over their eyes in the short term, it appears that the message of dissatisfaction has already been catching on. Setting aside the exceptional disruption caused by Covid, we must go as far back as 2014 to find comparatively low attendance figures. That we have now reached this low point speaks to a serious and ongoing neglect.

It is both disappointing and unacceptable that such a historically significant attraction, one that should be the cultural flagship of Gibraltar, is being allowed to fall into decline. Talk about strategy. If the museum is indeed a world leader in its field, then the question must be asked, why are we failing to translate that reputation to visitor engagement?

Who is to blame for this? If, as the Minister claims, the museum is widely known and well promoted, then marketing is clearly not the issue. The logical conclusion is that the problem lies with the product.

And if it is to fulfil its potential as a centrepiece of Gibraltar's cultural identity and tourism offering, as it does in every other part of the world, it must be properly resourced and revitalised without further delay. It is not enough to rely on abstract prestige or assumed visibility abroad. Turning to more statistics, it is regrettable that the data on the number of arrivals via the Land Frontier was also lagging behind by 12 months, only to be updated last week with the tabling of the Tourist Survey Report.

From the Report we can see a modest increase of 1.5% in arrivals via land compared to the same period last year. But let's not overstate it. This small uptick still leaves us 2 million visitors short of what we used to enjoy pre-pandemic.

So, 12 months after the Hon. the Chief Minister admitted that we were not quite in the good times yet, it's clear we're still stuck in the hard times and choppy waters with little sign of a meaningful turnaround.

As for air arrivals, the picture is equally bleak. By the end of 2024, just over 210,000 passengers had arrived to Gibraltar, which is a 10% drop from 2023. So, Madam Speaker, the numbers speak for themselves and no amount of spin can turn this decline into a success story. At least, not yet. So, while the Hon. the Minister for Tourism boasts about rising star badges in the context of increased searches for bookings to Gibraltar, it is as they say, a little too early to count your chickens before they hatch.

Because searches and rising star badges have not clearly translated into actual reservations, the volume of flights have not improved, but rather gotten worse. With that said, and with the latest addition of the new flight to Birmingham, it is very much hoped that we will in the near future see these figures increase, which will then lead to more visitors and more spending in our local economy. Perhaps by then we can legitimately consider ourselves as a rising star, and not the falling meteorite that we have recently become.

But as of today, we are yet to see the results of the sports-led and entertainment-led tourism which this Government promised it would attract if re-Elected. Despite all these

1995 failings, there is a potential prospect. With the political agreement now announced, and  
talk of enhanced use of Gibraltar's airport, we may finally be on the cusp of a greater EU-  
wide flight opportunities, if indeed we are able to commercially attract them. Then our  
impact in our connectivity, and by extension our visitor numbers, could be significant. But  
it is, as I say, a glimmer of hope, and one which must be nurtured. Because that glimmer,  
2000 Madam Speaker, is worthless if the tourists that land here only go and sip sangria in Spain,  
instead of enjoying a pint in La Piazza. If all we are doing is flying people in so that they  
can spend their money elsewhere, then let's be honest, we are not running a tourism  
strategy. We are running a transit lounge.

2005 Moving on, can I ask, when was the last time any of us enjoyed a proper night out in  
Gibraltar?

When did tourists or youth last rave about our nightlife?

The hard truth is, Gibraltar's tourism and leisure offering is embarrassingly incomplete.  
It is a glaring omission from our current tourism strategy that there is no structured night-  
time entertainment worth mentioning.

2010 No nightclubs, no late-night venues for music, dance or modern entertainment. For a  
destination pitching itself as a city break or a weekend hotspot, this is simply indefensible.  
How can we expect to compete with our Mediterranean rivals when come Friday or  
Saturday night, there's nowhere for young people to go?

2015 Not one nightclub. Not a single venue. So yes, our youth and our tourists head to Spain  
to unwind. Because here, we offer them nothing. And frankly, this isn't a failure, it is a  
social embarrassment. It's a direct hit to Gibraltar's economy that this Government  
chooses to ignore.

2020 The modern city break traveller is looking for more than just natural heritage and  
historical landmarks. They are looking for a complete experience which includes late-night  
offerings and evening options. Our tourism statistics clearly show that Gibraltar is  
overwhelmingly a day-trip destination, with the average stay being too short to bring  
meaningful economic benefit.

Even from a business point of view, this is a missed opportunity. A vibrant nightlife  
economy creates jobs and opportunities. Other cities of our size have understood this.

2025 Gibraltar under this Government's watch has not. Gibraltar is not just less attractive, it  
is incomplete. Madam Speaker, this is not just about clubbing or entertainment for its  
own sake. This is about the economic diversification, and modernising our tourism  
product to reflect the expectations of today's visitors. The longer this gap remains, the  
more it limits our growth potential, and the more young people, both tourists and locals,  
2030 will look elsewhere.

2035 What about hotels? The Chamber of Commerce recently commented on the lack of  
hotels in Gibraltar and the availability of beds, making a plea for an increase in both of  
these areas in the next few years to allow increases in overnight stays. As I have said in  
the past, the search for new business in terms of flight destinations, cruise calls and visitor  
numbers should be developed in tandem with our investments into our hotel  
infrastructure and that of our transport facilities. These pleas cannot simply be  
acknowledged and then left to gather dust.

2040 Otherwise, we risk creating a demand that we are simply not prepared to meet, which  
will result in turning the prospect of opportunity into missed potential. We have, however,  
seen an increase in bed availability through privately managed short lets, which we have

recently regulated this past year. However, while these have helped to ease some of the pressure, they are not, and cannot be, a substitute for a well-developed hotel sector.

If we are serious about attracting more overnight visitors, then we need proper hotel infrastructure. They need to be purpose-built, professionally managed and able to support the volume, and the standards expected of a modern destination. The Government, on its part, must stop dragging its feet and do everything possible to attract these vital investments sooner rather than later.

Looking at small visual improvements, I regret to note that the stone-paving bricks on Corral Road remain unreplaced, leaving the project unfinished and the whole area visually compromised. What exists now is a patchwork of partially restored brickwork, disrupted by an unsightly piece of tarmac at its centre. In its current state, the road falls short of reflecting the beauty and character we pride ourselves with, undermining the overall impression of our community.

Why has this not been fixed? I ask, is it a cost issue? Is there not a willingness to finish the job properly?

Didn't they campaign on getting the job done? Perhaps not, because there is a clear striking track record of unfinished projects. Unfinished bicycle routes which link up to nowhere, broken automated toilets at tourist hotspots like Grand Parade, and an abysmal entrance to the place that we call home, both at the Land Frontier and the Cruise Terminal, to name but a few.

But all this is fine, according to this Government. We continue to comfort ourselves with the rhetoric about the good times ahead, clinging ourselves to the promises of the brighter future that since 2016 have just always seemed out of reach. We fuel our nostalgia, hoping that it's enough to carry us through, and that somehow visitors will be able to look past the chaos that greets them.

All of this may now change, albeit a very long and painful nine years later. The recent announcement of a Political Agreement may indeed provide the motivation that was required to address some of these unsightly areas. In summing up all of this, we firmly request that significant resources are allocated to address all of these issues.

Because whilst we may see an increase in tourism expenditure of 7.1% this last Financial Year, it is still £41 million less than what we used to enjoy at our peak, now over five years ago. Slow motion progress, Madam Speaker.

Our journey back to those good times is far from over, and it demands more than rhetoric of a bright future that is to come. It requires honest reflection and a renewed commitment to doing things differently. If we truly are to recover and move closer to those good times.

Madam Speaker, I am delighted now to address you on the environment. It is firstly noted that a year has passed since I last raised some of the following concerns in this House. Regrettably, very little has changed. I say this with profound sadness because I greatly care for our environment and the consequences if we do not look after it.

But I also say this because of the respect and admiration that I have for the Hon. Minister. The issues, however, remain as visible and as pressing today as they were twelve months ago, and perhaps even more so. Our natural environment, that unique and irreplaceable landscape that we are so proud of, continues to suffer from chronic neglect.

Green spaces continue to diminish, with development projects sprouting relentlessly. Construction sites, scaffolding, dust and debris have become part of our everyday life and not just found at our beaches. The visual pollution this creates does no justice to

Gibraltar's image, not for those who call it a home or for those who we seek to attract as tourists. The complaints that Gibraltar looks unkept, unsightly and even filthy have not faded away. In fact, they have only intensified and indeed worsened.

On transport and pollution, again, no real and tangible progress has been made. The over-reliance on cars remains, and so does the traffic congestion, the poor air quality and the noise pollution. The density of vehicles in Gibraltar is still amongst the highest per capita in the world, a statistic we should not be wearing with pride. Yet we continue to approach the issue with hesitation and half-measures.

One such example, as many will recall, was a proposed pollution levy announced last year. It was a policy so ill-conceived, so detached from the lived reality of working-class families, that it had to be retracted just as quickly as it was announced. It was a policy that did nothing to improve the environment, because if you could afford to pay, you could afford to pollute.

That is not environmentalism. That is environmental inequality. And while I welcomed the swift reversal of that measure, I must also point out, backtracking is not the same as forward planning. We must recognise that avoiding bad policy is not the same as delivering good policy. Reacting to public outcry is not the same as planning to address the situation at hand. What is indeed needed is a coherent, long-term environmental strategy, one that includes investment in cleaner and more efficient public transport, the protection and expansion of green spaces, the enforcement of standards for air and noise pollution, and yes, a responsible and fair approach to reducing our dependency on private vehicles.

Madam Speaker, the people of Gibraltar deserve better, and so does our environment, because the cracks in our infrastructure, both literal and figuratively, have become glaringly obvious over the past year. Nowhere has this been more evident than at the Wellington Front, where Civil Servants were left scrambling to contain issues that should have been anticipated. The emergency works which have also come at an increased cost to the taxpayer was not an unforeseen emergency. It was a predictable result, for 14 years without a coherent plan to upgrade or modernise our sewer systems. So much so, that even sinkholes have recently appeared on two separate occasions on the same street, due to the dilapidated state of our main sewer system - it appears it is collapsing.

Addressing these sinkholes have also required emergency repairs which have come at an increased cost to the taxpayer. This kind of reactive Governance, one which responds to crises rather than prevent them, is unsustainable. It is not good for departmental expenditure, and it is certainly not good for the environment.

But that's OK, it seems, at least to them, because overtime and allowances are better than ever within this department, as we found out only last week. As I have said before, ultimate political responsibility rests with the Elected Government, and as our population have grown, their failure to invest in critical infrastructure has only worsened the strain. The longer we delay meaningful investment, the more costly and disruptive the consequences will become. These are not just health hazards, they are daily eyesores that diminish the quality of life for residents and tarnish Gibraltar's image.

If that were not enough, the continued delay of the promised Wastewater Treatment Plant is nothing short of shameful. After 14 years in office, this Government has failed to deliver a basic piece of infrastructure, one that any modern jurisdiction should consider essential.

As a result, raw sewage continues to be discharged directly into our surrounding waters, day after day and day after day. This is not only an environmental embarrassment, but also a serious public health concern. It is a failure of planning and of responsibility.

These should have been environmental and public health priorities, which the Government should have adequately dealt with, but regrettably have not. The contract in question was awarded preferred bidder status nearly two years ago, yet we have seen little to no tangible progress on the proposed works. Updates have been vague, and public confidence continues to erode.

Earlier this week, the Hon. Minister confirmed that the tender has been awarded to the preferred bidder, finally. However, it is notable that he did admit that there was still a number of commercial points to be agreed, so it may be the case that this is not yet signed, sealed and delivered. Nothing is agreed until everything is agreed.

It is my sincere hope, therefore, that these commercial points are soon resolved, and by this time next year I will not be standing once again, compelled to repeat the same uncomfortable truths about a Government who pretends to care for the environment and its people, because these are simply not political talking points. They are symptoms of a deeper systemic failure. Only a few short weeks ago, I was at the Sunborn's Aspire Conference on Sustainable Development, a conference which examined what Gibraltar should be doing to achieve its sustainability and climate objectives, with a particular focus on new building developments.

The conference was opened by the Hon. Minister for the Environment, where he said a few words during his opening address, which stuck with me today. *'Sustainability'*, he said, *'is about progress, and Gibraltar is an example to the rest of the world'*, end quote. The Minister would be delighted to hear that I totally agree with him.

We certainly are an example to the rest of the world, perhaps, but on how not to do things, at least insofar as the environment is concerned. For example, since my address last year, we have barely managed to move the needle on renewable energy consumption. In 2023, our renewable energy output stood at a minuscule 1.14%. This year, as at the end of 2024, we disappointingly managed to increase this up to 1.55%. This is not progress, Madam Speaker, it is inertia.

We heard on Tuesday that since taking over, now almost 14 years ago, that the Government had then no renewable energy. But despite the many millions of pounds invested, it appears that we still do not have any renewable energy now. So, while the other Minister likes to talk about hypothetical max capacities, I prefer to talk about the outcomes.

So, while small territories like ours across the globe are investing in renewables, we are still overwhelmingly dependent on fossil fuels. We cannot continue to speak the language of sustainability while acting in contradiction to it. But where are the contradictions, you ask?

Well, as I have just stated, we continue to pump raw, untreated sewage into our beloved oceans, whilst we see no movement and no progress on the treatment plant. We continue to have more cars than we do people, which aids in creating a noxious habitat where we bathe ourselves in fumes and pollution on a daily basis. Our beaches are plagued with dust, dirt and debris, causing an influx of infections and disappointment within our community.

Our waste recycling rates stand at a mere 12%, despite the Government's ambitious targets of reaching 55% by the end of this year. And finally, our clean energy stands at a



mere 1.5%, despite the many millions of pounds invested in it. All of these, Madam Speaker, are certainly examples of how the rest of the world should not follow suit.

We have also heard at the conference from the Hon. Minister for Healthcare and Business, who explained how the Gibraltar Development Plans of 1991 and 2009 both  
2185 helped shape the Gibraltar that we live in today, and how the Government is looking ahead to issuing a new draft plan by the end of this year, which will help shape the future of tomorrow. We very much look forward to seeing this new plan and sincerely hope that it adequately factors in all the significant changes which have taken place in Gibraltar over the past decade and a half, which includes the changes to our population, our economy  
2190 and our natural environment.

During the conference, the Minister also said something which I can't forget to this date. Speaking on sustainability, the Minister confessed that *'drafting the legislation is easy'*, she said, *'but getting the work done is the hard part'*, end quote. And how accurate was that? A statement that embodies perfectly the achievements, or rather lack thereof,  
2195 from this Government.

Because drafting the legislation on climate change is easy. Promising to build a Wastewater Treatment Plant is also easy. But reaching the interim and the net zero targets, or actually building the plant, is where the real work is done.

And quite frankly, it appears that we are not working hard enough. Maybe in their next  
2200 Election manifesto they should replace their slogan from 'getting the job done' to 'we will try our hardest but we probably won't succeed'. When analysing some of the data, we can see that according to this year's estimates of expenditure, the departmental Budget for the environment was once again over Budget, this year by a total of £1.3 million. The causes of the overspend derived largely from overtime wages, which is of course no  
2205 surprise given the answers we have recently heard in this House. The collection and disposal of refuse was also 20% over Budget for a second year running, with a total expenditure rising to a staggering £11.8 million. Just under £12 million for the collection and disposal of refuse.

But I am not surprised, because as we heard yesterday, we are dealing with the silver  
2210 medallist in the 'Bust the Budget Awards', so maybe next year he can aim for the bronze medal. Whilst last year's overspends coincided with Election-related activity, this year's figures point to a more systemic issue. We must now question whether these overruns are the result of consistent under-Budgeting or ongoing inefficiencies within the department.

2215 Either scenario is unsustainable. And crucially we must also ask that despite this increase in expenditure, is the public actually seeing a cleaner Gibraltar? Because if not, we have to be honest and ask ourselves, are we getting value for money here?

Because despite the record levels of spending, many would argue that Gibraltar does not look cleaner today than it did before. It seems to me that the only thing that is being  
2220 cleaned out is the public purse.

Madam Speaker, in terms of the Upper Rock tourist sites and beaches, it is highlighted that these too were also slightly over-Budget by half a million pounds, which brings me to my next observation. What exactly is £8.4 million being spent on? Because only last year we expressed concern with the chronic state of our beaches, particularly those on the  
2225 east side, which appear to be coated in dust from the never-ending construction.

This year the situation appears to have worsened, and we fail to understand how this is given the serious overspends in these areas.

The Budget for our beaches alone has increased by a staggering 24% since last year, so I would be very grateful if in their reply the Government could account for the increase in expenditure and explain why we are still not seeing any significant improvements here.

I now turn to the 25-year environmental plan, a document which is understood to be in its final stages of development. A draft was finally published for public consultation in December 2024, despite having been promised as far back as June 2023. It was now two Budget sessions ago when the Minister for the Environment addressed the then Mr Speaker and advised that, and I quote, *'the Government will this month be publishing its 25-year plan for the environment'*, end quote. This month, he said, in June 2023. The Minister has indeed redefined the concept of time, given that this month was now two years ago, Madam Speaker.

However, the Hon. Minister did confirm earlier this week that the plan would be released in draft by the end of that evening. So, while the plan has finally reached completion, I note that its delayed publication raised concerns. The consultation process, which it recently engaged on, though valuable for public engagement, has extended the timeline for its implementation.

Given the urgent environmental challenges Gibraltar faces, including air quality issues and the need for sustainable infrastructure, the prolonged development of this plan is a missed opportunity for timely action. The Government's commitment to environmental improvement is commendable, but the delay in finalising the blueprint underscores a need for more efficient policy development processes. Looking at specific projects, it is noted that this House is often called upon to weigh the practical against the principles, or the desirable against the ethical.

The proposal for an aquarium and oceanic research centre is one such matter. It raises concerns, not merely whether something can be done, but whether it should. In response to my recent question on this project, the Hon. Minister indicated that he is yet not in a position to express support for this project.

I understand that he is pending a review of the implications for heritage, animal welfare, and the credibility of the proposed research upon which this project is being justified. This is a prudent position to take, and I commend the Minister for resisting premature endorsement. But prudence alone is not enough when we are dealing with sentient life.

Aquariums can inspire all, they can foster learning, and they can, in the best of cases, act as gateways to scientific understanding. But we must also confront an uncomfortable truth that many modern Marine Biologists, Conservationists, and Animal Welfare Experts are increasingly questioning whether the captivity of ocean life can ever truly be justified, especially when it is not in the service of direct rescue or conservation. To enclose animals that are born to navigate vast and complex marine ecosystems solely to place them behind glass boxes for human observation raises a deep ethical dilemma.

Even with the best of intentions, can we square that confinement with the highest standards of animal welfare which we claim to uphold? Moreover, we must critically ask, where is the real education value of such an experience? Are we truly teaching respect for marine life, or are we just offering a spectacle dressed as science?

If the educational experience is based on distortion on animals behaving unnaturally in fabricated environments, then we are not educating, we are misleading, something which this GSLP Liberal Party are getting so good at doing. But Madam Speaker, there is equally

another important concern, one not grounded in ethics but in environmental sustainability and infrastructure resilience.

I understand that one of the main features of the proposed facility includes a large tank of approximately 180,000 litres of water. It is not the only tank included in this project, but one of many. Such installations are not environmentally neutral. They require significant amounts of electricity to regulate temperature, power filtration systems, provide artificial lighting, and a continuous supply of treated water.

Research into tanks of this scale has shown that they carry a high carbon footprint, especially when operated in regions without significant renewable energy infrastructure. And this then raises a pressing concern. Can Gibraltar's current electrical grid support a facility of this intensity without placing further strain on our system?

Because I am sure that we can all agree in this House that we do not want to see the blackouts returning. Equally, in a time when we are encouraging conservation of energy and reduction of emissions, can we justify launching a project that may increase consumption across all these areas? These are not merely operational questions. They go to the heart of whether this project aligns with our climate commitments and with our sustainability goals.

Madam Speaker, I am not here to condemn the idea of marine research or public education. But I do believe that if such a centre is to be built, it must stand up to the highest ethical and environmental scrutiny.

We must support science, but not at the expense of compassion. We must value education, but not when it distorts the truth. We must pursue innovation and development, but not when it comes at a cost of principle and sustainability.

So, I urge the Minister to be cautious and to give all these matters serious thought before he considers green lighting such a project when the time arises. But I am sure that the Minister knows all of this, and hence why he could not commit in Parliament questions when I asked him whether this project had its full support.

Madam Speaker, as we examine this year's capital investment programme, we must not only scrutinise how much we are spending but reflect on the values that underpin our spending decisions. Few developments exemplify this balance of opportunity and responsibility more than the Eastside project.

It has been positioned as a transformative initiative, one that could unlock economic growth, revitalise underutilised land, and provide new housing and infrastructure. The potential is, in principle, welcomed. But potential must not be confused with inevitability. And ambition must not come at the cost of transparency, environmental stewardship or public trust. As I highlighted during recent proceedings, the handling of key components of this project, such as beach nourishment and the proposed marina at Catalan Bay, has raised legitimate concerns.

We were told that beach equilibrium would be reached within 10 years, yet no binding guarantees. No long-term contingency plans have been clearly articulated. Beaches like Eastern Beach and Catalan Bay are not private amenities. They are national, communal spaces, and part of our shared environmental legacy.

Whether or not the public purse funds the interventions directly, the public still bears the consequences of their success, or more importantly, their failure. Meanwhile, when it comes to the proposed marina and breakwater, we must be careful not to dismiss concerns by residents, planners and experts alike, as if they were nothing more than political noise.

The comparison to plans from nearly two decades ago does little to address the current and well-founded anxieties about coastal impact, visual encroachment and the erosion of our communal spaces. A statement that the public will be able to see over the seawall is not a legitimate answer to a question that is fundamentally about preservation. And so, I repeat, this is not a call against development.

It is a call for better development, for planning that is rigorous, for engagement that is sincere, and for delivery that is also mindful of our coastal identity as it is of our economic ambitions. If we get the balance right, the Eastside project could indeed become a model of smart, sustainable growth. But if we get it wrong, the cost will not just be financial, it will be generational.

Finally, Madam Speaker, yes, finally, I will turn to transport. A note, Madam Speaker, that a lot of transport-related matters have already been covered, at least in respect of tourism, concerns and the environment, so I will endeavour to be as brief as possible and deal with issues not already covered throughout this final part of my address.

In exchanges in Parliament earlier this year, we raised questions regarding the updated Sustainable Traffic, Transport and Parking Plan, which I would be referring to as the Transport Plan. Here, we raised concerns in order to critically highlight how very little has been done in this area since its adoption now almost eight years ago.

The Transport Plan, in its original form, had aspired to achieve many things, such as addressing road traffic safety, oversee traffic planning matters, better management of the impact of developments on traffic, addressing issues at junctions, and improving access to the City Centre. Despite the many aspirations of this Transport Plan, it appears the Government has decided to start with and stop at the introduction of bicycle lanes, which even then have only been developed in a peace-filled manner. It is disappointing that despite the ambitions of the Traffic Plan, the Government have done very little, if anything at all, to alleviate and address the major traffic-flow issues referred to in the Plan, which appear to plague Gibraltar on a daily basis.

Unfortunately, our over-reliance on personal transport vehicles to navigate in and around Gibraltar is only compounded further by the lack of a reliable and efficient transport system. A transport system which paradoxically also forms part of the Government's original Transport Plan. There are well over 40,000 registered motor vehicles in Gibraltar, and this is no longer sustainable, which raises several concerns in respect of road safety issues on our roads.

These very points were recently highlighted over the course of the last few months, such as the dangers many vulnerable road users are experiencing when navigating through the Gibraltar Road Labyrinth. Particularly those who are using e-scooters and bicycles. With that said, safety concerns were also raised as to whether these types of road users were subjected to a theory or practical exam under the Highway Code prior to being eligible to use our public roads.

It appears that they do not. This is concerning, not least given the increasing number of complaints that have been received by members of the public of these vehicle users, often flouting many of the relevant road rules which often put them and others at risk. Perhaps it is high time that we invest more money in this area and subject these users to some kind of examination which would no doubt assist in making our roads safer.

Speaking of safety, I recently asked the Hon. Minister a simple question. Are the roads safe? The roads that he is responsible for? He said yes, confidently. Of course, that wasn't a response that was just arrogant. It was dangerous, Madam Speaker. Let me explain.

I raised concerns as to the deficiencies contained with our current Transport Act which gives outdated a whole new meaning. The legislation is two decades old. There are zero legal requirements to report serious medical conditions that could impair driving. None. This is no doubt putting the public and drivers at risk. In the UK, which we often boast we mirror, if you suffer from epilepsy or a stroke, you are legally obliged to stop driving and inform the authorities.

In Gibraltar, nothing. No policy, no enforcement, no concern. Are we seriously pretending that medical conditions such as these don't affect drivers here?

What kind of fantasy are we living in? It's worse than negligence. It is a wilful blind spot.

There are no clear lists of disqualifying conditions, no guidance, no infrastructure that protects the general public. When someone over 70 wants to renew their licence, they go to a private doctor, pay a fee and get signed off based off a chat. No access to medical records, no checks, no oversight and no involvement of public health.

That's not a safeguard. That's a loophole you could ride a bus through. I brought this to the attention of the Minister just a few short months ago for our concerns only to be brushed aside.

So let me try again, plainly. This is like certifying a car as roadworthy after inspecting just 20% of it and taking the owner's word for the rest of it. This isn't just hypothetical.

It is irresponsible, deeply concerning Madam Speaker and it is happening right now. We are essentially gambling with people's lives. This is reckless and it's not a question of will this lead to a tragedy.

It is a question of when. And when it does, the responsibility will squarely sit with those who knew but chose to do nothing about it. So I say again, as I did at the start of my Budget Address, it is difficult to remain constructive when it appears that our concerns, some which are more serious than others, appear to have fallen on deaf ears.

I nevertheless expect that such deficiencies are addressed as a matter of urgency before any avoidable harm is caused and we find ourselves regretting inaction before it's already too late. So, let me ask him one more time, does he think our roads are safe?

Madam Speaker, let me briefly touch on the taxi service, which whilst I note is not strictly speaking a Budgeted item, it is nevertheless coming at a cost in time, resources and public patience.

We welcome the new regulations mandating minimum taxi availability for flights, but let's be honest, it shouldn't have taken legislation to fix what should be a basic public service. Reliable taxis are essential for our community, for business and for Gibraltar's credibility as a modern destination. Service levels have long been unacceptable and while the Government doesn't fund the association, it licences, it regulates it and with that comes responsibility.

And I say this not just in theory, I speak from experience. I lived it. After breaking my leg and a few weeks just after surgery, I spent 24 minutes trying to get through to dispatch with no answer and no taxi. I had to hobble to Parliament on my crutches and were told that things are improving. But the experience I went through spoke volumes of the level of service provided. And I can only but imagine the frustration that our tourists, residents, the elderly or persons living with disabilities must go through.

We can and need to do so much better here. For example, until recently we've only just had one accessible taxi and even that one wasn't always in service. The arrival of a second and the promise of seven more is welcome, but long overdue.

Gibraltar cannot sell itself as a modern and inclusive destination while failing at something as fundamental as transport. If the current system cannot deliver, then it's time for tighter regulation. We cannot hesitate to take action.

Madam Speaker, this is, after all, a public service. But before I move on, given that I've made reference to having broken my leg last year, I find that it is only just and fair to thank all those involved in my swift recovery, from A&E to radiology, to the surgeons, theatre staff and nurses who operated on me, to the physios and doctors who dealt with my aftercare. Thank you.

I would not be standing here to give my address without you, and for that I am grateful. It's amazing what the GHA can do when assembling a team that works in unison. It was a seamless experience, and one can only hope that every patient has the same journey and receives the same standard of care in these situations.

Turning back to transport, and on the issue of subscription and sustainability measures, questions were posed in Parliament to ascertain whether or not the Government itself was subscribing to its own idea of electrifying and creating a greener transport sector for the Gibraltar, which unfortunately left many in shock when they found out that less than 5% of the additional or replacement of public service vehicles in 2024 were electric. So, while the Minister advised that the Government was leading by example in carrying out a review of the Government fleet and to electrify as much as possible, it is notable that out of the 21 public vehicles that were acquired or replaced, one was electric, one was a hybrid, meaning that the other 19 vehicles representing 90% were powered by petrol.

This is certainly by no measure leading by example. The irony of the answers provided to Parliament is nothing short of an embarrassing admission by the Government that notwithstanding its Electoral promises in its Party manifesto to create a green and efficient transport network and to decarbonise the transport sector in a move to vehicle electrification, that it will do so not by leading by example, as one would hope, but instead by imposing the cost of decarbonisation on the general public.

It is regrettable that this is a position which has been taken, not least given how much green transport initiatives featured in their manifesto. Because it appears that despite having a whole chapter dedicated to this area, the Government for a second-year running are merely paying lip service to these initiatives and to those people who supported them. It is therefore very difficult to take the Minister's environmental credentials seriously when his policies consistently undermine the very principles he claims to champion.

With that said, I sincerely hope that within the next two years we will see significant improvements in these areas. But again, that might be the optimist in me speaking. Until such time, it would appear that notwithstanding the fact pollution indeed does have an impact on people's health and quality of life, it is lamentable that the efforts to reduce air pollution are clearly not a GSLP Liberal Party priority.

It is either that, or an acknowledgement that the electoral manifesto promises, often described as a contract with the people of Gibraltar, are not worth the paper on which they were written on. I can only but expect that in the final second half of this four-year electoral term, the Government will indeed follow through with its electoral promises and pay dividends to the people of Gibraltar who voted for them, on what so far appears to be the false narrative that they will be delivering a greener, safer and much more effective transport system for our community. Madam Speaker, as I conclude my address, which I no doubt some of the Minister's opposite will be grateful to hear, I must once again stress

2460 that it is our shared responsibility to advocate for a Budget that truly reflects our collective values and our priorities.

From my perspective, this includes advocating for greener transport initiatives and investment, youth development, infrastructural transport needs and the promotion of tourism. These are not peripheral concerns. They are the essential pillars for securing a  
2465 prosperous future for all Gibraltarians, especially that of our young people.

I wish to remind those in this House and those who are still watching or listening that it is the role of the Opposition to question, to scrutinise and to ensure that the Government decisions are properly accountable. We get told by Members opposite that we get given a good salary for our contribution to this House and that we should do more  
2470 to justify this, almost as if they are questioning our worth. Madam Speaker, on reflection of this all, I find myself questioning their listening skills when I have given example after example of constructive criticisms that continue to go in one ear and out the other.

But it is my earnest expectation that my contribution and my criticisms are received in the constructive spirit in which they are intended. It is with these words and for the reasons I have outlined, Madam Speaker, as well as those put forward by my Hon.  
2475 colleagues thus far, as well as those which are still to come, that I will not be supporting the Appropriation Bill.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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### Adjournment

**Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Well, Madam Speaker, if I can just rise for a moment to congratulate the hon. Gentleman for that beautifully read Peter and Jane Do the Budget speech for 2025, which included a reference to sentient creatures, and I think  
2485 there were some in this Chamber when he started. But to say that perhaps he is too young to know that for most of that speech I was left repeating to myself the opening words of the lyrics of the theme to MASH.

And although I am not going to start replying now, Madam Speaker, because I have got a lot to get through and still some speeches to hear from the other side which no doubt will require me to reply, I need to excuse myself from the Parliament, Madam Speaker, or excuse myself to the Parliament, because tomorrow I will not be able to be here when Parliament resumes, and I propose that we resume at 11 to take the contribution of the Hon. Minister for Sport.  
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But I have the sports day of a very, very, very important young lady and I have absolutely no intention of missing it. But I shall be here after that to hear the contributions from Members opposite that still remain and those Members of this side of the House that still remain. So, I propose that the House should now adjourn to 11 o'clock tomorrow.  
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**Madam Speaker:** I now propose the question, which is that this House do now adjourn to 11 a.m. tomorrow. I now put the question, which is that this House should now adjourn to 11 a.m. Those in favour? (**Members:** Aye.) Those against? Passed.  
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This House will now adjourn to 11 a.m. tomorrow morning.

*The House adjourned at 7.57 p.m.*