



PRESS RELEASE

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Feetham Fails in Budget Debate

- Leader of the Opposition sinks GSD to new low by failing to ask questions on the details of the Estimates
- Feetham rendered mute by Picardo reply
- Contradiction in having said Debt Ceiling had been exceeded but still voting for further spending

The Chief Minister, the Hon Fabian Picardo QC, says that the public should explicitly note the lack of any intervention from the Leader of the Opposition during the course of the Committee Stage and Third Reading of the Budget debate. This is the stage of the debate in Parliament when every member has the chance to scrutinise every penny of Government spending.

Mr Feetham has repeatedly said that the state of the public finances is the most important issue for the forthcoming election. And yet when he had a chance to go through the detail of the proposed spending for next year, both the direct Government spending, he failed to ask ANY questions on the recurrent expenditure.

This is the first time in the history of our Parliament that a Leader of the Opposition has failed to make any contribution to the discussion of the recurrent expenditure part of the Estimates book. In the whole analysis of over 200 pages of the accounts, Mr Feetham only sought clarification of one item.

Mr Feetham only raised a question in respect of an item of £1000 out of the Improvement and Development Fund Capital expenditure estimated at £94 million, and this was to ask in respect of which government company was it intended to increase the capital by £1000. He was told by Joe Bossano that this was a token figure which had been included also in last year's budget and was not spent last year, and might not be spent this year.

In fact, the Opposition has now had the opportunity to examine the expenditure of each department and to question the amounts that are being provided before approval for the Department of this expenditure takes place at the committee stage. The Leader of the Opposition had been invited by Joe Bossano to take advantage of this opportunity at the committee stage to indicate where he would be making cuts in departmental expenditure to remove the £50 million of



overspending which he claims forms part of the estimate and which he says if he were in government he would be using to reduce the national debt.

Not only did Mr Feetham not do this, he didn't even ask any questions about any part of the £453 million that Parliament has now approved as expenditure, something that no Leader of the Opposition has ever done before in debating the estimates.

Indeed, by voting in favour and raising no questions or objections to any of the items of expenditure in the total departmental budgets for the apartments to spend £453 million, in effect, what Mr Feetham and his colleagues are doing, is saying that they see nothing wrong with this level of spending which is required for the efficient running of the government in the current 12 month financial year

This demonstrates that he has nothing meaningful to say about the accounts of 'Gibraltar plc'. His Parliamentary colleagues in the House, Messrs Bossino, Figueras, Netto and Reyes all asked questions about their areas of responsibility but Mr Feetham asked nothing. Having made such a song and dance of overspending in departments led by the Chief Minister, he failed to ask a single question about the detail of the Estimates. He said he wanted to reduce spending, yet he didn't question even ONE PENNY of the proposed spending at the time when he has the chance to scrutinise the finances of our nation. Mr Feetham was in effect rendered mute as a result of the Chief Minister's reply to his arguments.

Having said so often that public finance was so important, his abject failure to be in Parliament for most of the debate and then not to get involved in scrutinising the detail of the spending is another Feetham contradiction of massive proportions and it demonstrates the obvious weaknesses in what he has been peddling, along with his equally-flawed arguments on the LNG issues.

"Maybe he was just off-balance given that his off-balance sheet argument was seen to be so off-the-wall after my reply," said the Chief Minister.

"Whatever the reason, Mr Feetham singularly failed in the discharge of his obligations as Leader of the Opposition and demonstrated, once again, he does not have calibre to be Chief Minister. If the scandal of the Lloyd's Report and the secretive collaboration with Spark were not enough to demonstrate it, then his woeful performance in the most important part of the process of scrutiny of Government's Estimate of accounts may well be the straw that breaks the camel's back for the rest of our community, even those in the GSD. At least the Opposition voted with the Government to pass the Budget Bill thus showing that Mr Feetham does not believe his own arguments about Gibraltar 'being skint', or 'reaching the debt ceiling' as he said in an interview on GBC. If he really believed his own nonsensical arguments, he would surely have felt it necessary to vote against allowing the Government to spend the money voted for this year. But it seems Daniel Feetham is not even capable of persuading himself that he is right. This was just another Feetham contradiction to add to an ever-growing list."