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3 Deputy J.A. Martin of St. Helier of the Chief Minister regarding the appointment of Assistant Ministers: [1(39)]

Following the Assembly's adoption of P.53/2016, will the Chief Minister update Members on how he proposes Assistant Ministers should be elected after the 2018 elections; will he ensure that this information is in the public domain before the Assembly decides whether or not to reduce the number of States Members; and, if not, when will he make it available?

Senator I.J. Gorst (The Chief Minister):

Since the agreement of P.53 last year officers in my department, and the Department for Community and Constitutional Affairs, have been developing a number of potential options for improvements to the machinery of government centred around the role and processes for appointing Assistant Ministers. These options focus on refining our current system so that it is more inclusive and are due to be discussed over the coming weeks, including discussions with current Ministers, Assistant Ministers, P.P.C. (Privileges and Procedures Committee), the Chairmen's Committee and with the Deputy herself, before a proposal is brought to this Assembly for debate. That process will take longer than the timeline for debating the change to the composition of this Assembly at the next States sitting.

3.3.1 Deputy J.A. Martin:

It is very relevant because after I asked this question Senator Ozouf lodged an amendment, and it states in my proposition, P.53: "If Members are amenable to adopting new ways we work." Well, a lot of things I am but not psychic and I really think the Chief Minister should let us know what these propositions are before we debate whether we go to 38, 44 or pick another figure out of the air. Does he not agree?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

Back-Benchers, or any Member of this Assembly, are enabled under Standing Orders to lodge any proposition that they wish within this Assembly. The Deputy knows that my officers have been undertaking this work. I have had a brief conversation with the president of the Chairmen's Committee. He was quite clear that he wished for me to consult with them and discuss with them prior to lodging any amendments. It was also recognised that consulting with P.P.C., with other Assistant Ministers and Ministers, prior to lodging of them, was an appropriate way forward.

3.3.2 Deputy M. Tadier:

Ministers currently get to choose who goes on Scrutiny but the Assembly has no say whatsoever in who becomes an Assistant Minister. Arguably there are Assistant Ministers who have more power than some Ministers themselves. Does the Chief Minister accept those statements and does he agree that it would be helpful for future reference in the impending debates to have the information that Deputy Martin is seeking?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

I can see that it would be helpful but without agreement it would not be helpful because it would just be an idea around which many Members may disagree. But the premise of agreeing the proposition of Deputy Martin was that we would do this work and then we would consult and we would deal with the difficult issue of whether Assistant Ministers should be elected by this Assembly to their offices and what is the role of Assistant Ministers and how that can be used to deliver a more inclusive system.

3.3.3 Deputy S.Y. Mézec of St. Helier:

Notwithstanding the other changes that the Chief Minister might like to potentially see in the way Assistant Ministers are appointed or elected, could he confirm whether or not he personally remains committed to the principles of the Troy Rule?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

The Deputy knows that you cannot change the remit and function of Assistant Ministers without a change to the Troy Rule, as it is currently written. This Assembly, when it set up the machinery of government subcommittee in the previous Assembly, wrestled with that issue and on balance they decided that they wanted to keep the system as now is. But throughout the period of this Assembly, many Members have said that the system is not inclusive, that they do not feel involved in what Ministers are doing or who is making the decisions. We cannot have both of those. We need to make a decision and that is what the proposal will do and that is what we will consult with Members upon.

3.3.4 Deputy G.P. Southern:

When the Chief Minister says he decided to consult did he have psychic powers himself in that he knew that there would be another proposition coming forward, in this case from a Back-Bencher, for a major reform of the way we elect the body and did he accept in some way that it was okay to wait for this reform while we discuss this new reform, which is a major one?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

No, it was expected that the officers in the 2 departments would do their work. They were also of course we know working together with P.P.C. on the reform of this Assembly. That is what I expected to happen. That P.P.C. would come forward with a proposal to reform this Assembly and that my department would come forward, together with the Deputy of St. Peter's department, with proposals to change the machinery of government. That has slightly been thrown, that timeline, with Deputy Andrew Lewis lodging his proposal to reform this Assembly.

3.3.5 Deputy C.F. Labey of Grouville:

In the Chief Minister's considerations, clearly with regard to the Troy Rule is he also going to consider the doctrine of collective responsibility because clearly he will not be able to have both? If the Troy Rule goes then the doctrine of collective responsibility will also have to go. Does he appreciate that?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

I appreciate that they are connected and they need to be considered. You could take the other argument, that is that the collective responsibility only applies to Ministers around the table, and not to other Assistant Ministers. But they need to be considered together. The Deputy is absolutely right.

3.3.6 Deputy J.A. Martin:

I am very disappointed. For the last 5 minutes we have been knitting with fog. The Chief Minister says there is a proposal. He knows what the proposal is and so do 10 other people in this Assembly. What the rest of us do not know is what that proposal is or even the bones of it. But we are going to vote in 2 weeks' time to go down to 38 or 44 Members. Will the Chief Minister please call an urgent briefing for States Members to see what it would look like because they must know? If they do not, why would we be debating to change the whole of the way we elect ourselves again?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

Every time we have had a debate on the composition of this Assembly people have said they cannot vote for changes to the composition of the Assembly because they have some idea that they would like to change for the machinery of government. Every time we have brought forward changes to the machinery of government, Members of this Assembly have said they cannot vote for the changes to the machinery of government because we do not know what the Assembly is going to look like. I do not disagree with the Deputy. But it would be far better if there were opportunity to consider what the changes to the machinery of government might look like. But I cannot see that it will be possible to do some consultation, which is right, with the Chairmen's Committee and other Members, prior to a debate on 31st January. If that debate were to be deferred by a fortnight then of course I think there probably would be opportunity to have consultation and to brief. That particular proposal I am prepared to consider with Deputy Andrew Lewis.