

6. Deputy M.R. Higgins will make a personal statement regarding comments made in the States Assembly on 3rd February 2009

6.1 Deputy M.R. Higgins:

During the elections late last year I stated on a number of occasions that to restore the trust of the electorate in politicians in the States politicians who make mistakes should be prepared to own up and admit them. I also believe that that is the honest and honourable thing to do. During the States debate on 3rd February 2009 I made a mistake which I would like to admit to and correct. At the beginning of the debate the Chairman of the Privileges and Procedures Committee raised a matter of privilege for the Bailiff, who was presiding over the Assembly at the time, relating to an item on Senator Stuart Syvret's blog which followed and in camera debate regarding suspension of the Chief of Police. The Chairman stated to the Bailiff that she had written to the Bailiff the previous week to give notice as required, under Standing Order 8, that she wished to raise a matter that her committee considered affected the privileges of the States and said that she would like to propose that the issue was formally referred to P.P.C. (Privileges and Procedures Committee) to allow her committee to investigate it. This statement was then questioned firstly by Senator Syvret who asked why this matter had to be formally referred to P.P.C. when they plainly had the power quite autonomously to investigate any matter they considered to fall within this kind of right, and secondly, by Deputy Le Claire of St. Helier who said: "I find it bizarre that in a grandstanding way this has been requested to be referred to the P.P.C. when it is completely within their power to investigate which matters they choose to and if they need to seek clarification on whether the matters of privilege affected the States they could write to you, they could meet with you, as I have done in the past, to discuss those issues and there is no need to prejudice any outcome by grandstanding this issue or other issues in the future by requesting formal referrals." The Bailiff responded to Deputy Le Claire's statement by saying: "I think that the Privileges and Procedures Committee is proceeding entirely in accordance with Standing Orders. Standing Orders require the committee, or any Member who thinks that a matter of privilege is in question to refer the matter to the Bailiff, the Chairman has done that, and then to raise it on the floor of the Assembly, the Chairman has done that, and the Chairman could proceed this morning to raise a substantive proposition, but she has told Members that she wishes to give Senator Syvret the opportunity to say anything to the committee which he might, on reflection, wish to do. That seems an entirely proper way to proceed." Now, at this point in the process I intervened with a point of information and said: "This matter was referred to P.P.C. at its previous meeting by the Bailiff himself who brought up the question of privilege and so that this, in the interests of transparency, should be revealed." Unfortunately, in the heat of the moment my mouth was engaged before my brain and I did not say what I meant to say. I have been dismayed by what I had heard at the point of time because no mention had been made of the fact that the matter had been raised at the previous P.P.C. meeting and discussed with the Bailiff. As I felt that this was less than transparent I got to my feet and spoke out. What I should have said was that a meeting of the P.P.C. took place, that a matter was discussed, and that it was discussed with the Bailiff who had been invited to the meeting by the Greffier to give advice to the committee on that matter. I therefore wish to set the record straight and to apologise to the Bailiff for stating the matter was referred to P.P.C. by the Bailiff himself, which it was not. Thank you.