

### **3. Questions to Ministers without notice - The Minister for Social Security**

#### **The Bailiff:**

Very well, that concludes questions on notice, so we now come to questions to Ministers without notice, and the first period is the Minister for Social Security. Deputy de Sousa.

#### **3.1 Deputy D.J. De Sousa:**

Recently, the Minister has received a dental report from the Scrutiny Panel. The response to that is due over the Christmas period. What guarantees has he got for the panel that that will be given to Members of the Scrutiny Panel in time for the Christmas break?

#### **Deputy I.J. Gorst of St. Clement (The Minister for Social Security):**

Of course that will depend on when Members are taking their Christmas break. I understand that the response is indeed required by 20th December and I aim, in conjunction with the Minister for Health and Social Services, to have the response prior to that date.

#### **3.2 Deputy J.M. Maçon:**

We talked about the unemployment figures earlier today, and as we know that youth unemployment makes up a significant proportion of that, can the Minister please inform the Assembly how many apprenticeship spaces are available and whether the Minister feels that there are enough and, if not, what is the Minister going to do about it?

#### **Deputy I.J. Gorst:**

I always feel that there should be more apprenticeship places available. I come to this from the aspect that we should be training as many people as we can, that we should have as many apprenticeships as we can. Of course we must engage with the local business community and the States as an employer to ensure that more and more are available. We have seen during this economic downturn more apprenticeships available. The Skills Executive and the Skills Board are working to increase the number of apprenticeships. We have increased the number of places on the Advance to Work scheme; we have increased the administration training places; we are increasing the trust in company training places; we are increasing also and looking at rolling-out retail training as well, so I always think that there should be more, but we are doing everything that we can and it is at the forefront of our aims.

#### **3.3 Deputy G.P. Southern:**

In the light of the potential reintroduction of prescription charges in 2011, will the Minister inform Members of the current numbers of those income support claimants who prior to 2008 were H.I.E. (Health Insurance Exemption) recipients with free prescriptions and access to G.P.s and for whom household medical accounts were set up? Also state whether household medical accounts are to be maintained and how income support claimants will be treated following any changes to medical, clinical or pharmaceutical charges?

#### **Deputy I.J. Gorst:**

I wonder where I have heard that before? As the Deputy will know, he had submitted this very question as a written question for the next States sitting. I have had notice this morning that he has now withdrawn that and obviously his intention was to ask it as an oral question. I do not have those pieces of information with me, and I am sure Members would not expect me to do so. The H.I.E. system was prior to my appointment as Minister, therefore I would not have those available and therefore the premise of the whole question I am afraid I am not able to answer. However, perhaps he would like to maintain it as a written question for the next sitting and then I will be able to provide the numbers he requests.

#### **3.3.1 Deputy G.P. Southern:**

May I ask the central core question, which does not require detailed information: state whether household medical accounts are to be maintained and adapted to any new charge system?

**Deputy I.J. Gorst:**

Household medical accounts are maintained. However, they are, as all elements of income support are, under review. I will be very shortly announcing what I am going to propose for the reintroduction of prescription charges. At this point, the Deputy will have to wait to see what that is, but those on income support will be catered for within those proposals.

**3.4 Deputy P.V.F. Le Claire:**

I wonder if the Minister for Social Security might wish to comment upon the international report issued by the O.E.C.D. (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) and highlighted in today's *Daily Mail* that suggests inflated salaries of G.P.s are depriving millions of people in the United Kingdom of 3 years of their life?

**The Bailiff:**

I am not entirely sure the Minister is responsible for the health of the United Kingdom, Deputy, but...

**Deputy I.J. Gorst:**

Hopefully not for the editorial content of the *Daily Mail*. It may surprise the Member to find out that I am not a reader or subscriber of the *Daily Mail*. It is difficult for me to comment. However, should he wish to point me in the direction of what one would hope was research that the editorial comments arose from, then of course I am always willing to look at that. It would seem to be surprising that an individual's salary could ...

**Deputy P.V.F. Le Claire:**

May I ask the Minister to give way? My question specifically will bear out in Hansard: an international report issued by the O.E.C.D.

**Deputy I.J. Gorst:**

I thank the Deputy for that. I have not read that report and therefore it is not appropriate for me to comment upon it.

**3.5 Senator S.C. Ferguson:**

I recently sent the Minister an analysis of benefits in terms of consumption for a particular foreign country. Will the Minister include a review of income support in these terms in his forthcoming income support review?

**Deputy I.J. Gorst:**

Technology is a wonderful thing when it works. I have been out of the Island and returned only yesterday from Jersey Overseas Aid Commission business. I did receive the email from the Senator. Unfortunately, I was not able to reach the link because of a fault with my BlackBerry, and therefore I cannot comment on what it is that that link or email was proposing. Perhaps once I have read it I might be able to give the undertaking that she is requesting.

**3.5.1 Senator S.C. Ferguson:**

I will make sure that the Minister gets that link, because the indications in it are that someone on minimum wage in the U.S. (United States) in fact has in terms of consumption an income of something like 60,000 dollars a year, and therefore I think that a similar review in the Minister's forthcoming income support review might be helpful for Islanders, and I wonder if the Minister agrees with me on that?

**Deputy I.J. Gorst:**

I think if I understand correctly - as I say, I have not seen the content of the comment - the Deputy is probably referring to something that we call a deprivation survey, which asks people what they can afford to buy during the course of the week. This was a survey very similar to the one undertaken by Scrutiny earlier in the year, and it is very similar to the questions which will be in the annual Social Survey being undertaken this year, and it really marries-up with the Income Distribution Survey, and from those 2 surveys, then we can start to understand what the level of income is, what individuals feel they can spend their money on from a consumption point of view. We really need to put those 2 pieces of information together before we can start to draw conclusions. It would not be right to take one or the other to draw conclusions about people's income and about what they can afford, and therefore about poverty or relative low income.

**Senator S.C. Ferguson:**

Well, it was not quite that, but I will speak with the Minister.

**The Bailiff:**

Thank you, Senator. Deputy Le Hérissier.

**3.6 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:**

Would the Minister not acknowledge that by framing the provision for residential care as an additional contribution, he lost the opportunity to make it more palatable, where it could have been framed as an insurance scheme? Indeed, some people are now interpreting it simply as an additional tax which will be lost in the general tax system.

**Deputy I.J. Gorst:**

It is very difficult. Those who oppose a particular course of action will of course frame it in the light which gives their argument the greatest credence. I have been absolutely clear, it resulted out of my Green Paper consultation that the majority of people responded wanted a separate standalone ring-fenced fund and they wanted Social Security to gather that contribution in the same way that we gather the current Social Security contributions. It is not a tax. It is a contribution that I am proposing all individuals make throughout their life, therefore they do not suffer the very real shock that many families are now facing when either themselves or a loved one has to go into care and they are faced with bills towards £1,200 or £1,400 every week. I really do hope that the individuals in the community do not see it as a tax, because it is not a tax. It could be framed in regard to insurance. However, it is not ...

**The Bailiff:**

Minister, I am not sure that is precise enough.

**Deputy I.J. Gorst:**

I am trying to be precise, but it was a question which really requires rather a detailed answer. It is not an insurance-based scheme in the traditional insurance aspect, but what it is is pooling the cost and the risk of whether we are going to need care for all of us later in life.

**3.7 Deputy A.T. Dupré of St. Clement:**

I was approached by one of my parishioners recently, who had to go for his flu injection. He was in there for about 45 seconds, had his injection, and noticed although he only had to pay £10 that the doctor was given £19. He was a bit concerned. Is this the usual way?

**Deputy I.J. Gorst:**

As far as I am aware, it is of course G.P.s charge the rate that they think is appropriate. I subsidise each visit to the G.P. with £19. It is not really for me to say whether the £10 on top of that £19 was good value or not. Obviously our shared parishioner felt in that instance it was not.

What I should say is that G.P.s do charge different prices and perhaps it is sometimes appropriate for members of the community to see what other G.P.s are charging before they make the decision to visit for a particular condition or injection that they might need to have.

### **3.8 Senator P.F. Routier:**

In a previous answer regarding the reintroduction of prescription charges, the Minister gave an assurance that people on income support were likely to be looked after. I was just wondering, without pre-empting the outcome of the investigation which is currently going on, whether he was able to give the same assurance to pensioners and to people suffering from chronic illnesses?

### **Deputy I.J. Gorst:**

Perhaps the Assistant Minister misheard what I said. He perhaps should go back and listen to Hansard later. However, I am sure he has got more important things to do with his time. We really do need to wait until I publish my proposals. Uppermost in my mind is of course those with chronic conditions and ensuring they are able to access appropriate medicines for the conditions that they suffer from, and that methodology - hopefully - will be able to help, as well those on low incomes and those senior citizens as well.

[12:00]

### **3.9 The Deputy of Grouville:**

Is it the case that G.P.s are able now to advertise their rates and if they do not, or they cannot, should they not be able to, and indeed, be encouraged to do so?

### **Deputy I.J. Gorst:**

This is a discussion that I had with the Deputy last week, and I am not aware whether they are or are not. It would seem strange to me that they were not able to advertise their rates, but I am led to believe that perhaps they are not. I personally think it would be a positive thing if they were in a controlled way allowed to advertise their rates so that members of the public did realise that there is a difference ...

### **The Bailiff:**

Sorry, could we have a bit more quiet, please. I cannot hear what is being said.

### **Deputy I.J. Gorst:**

... that there is a difference in what G.P.s charge for particular services that they provide to the community. It is right that there is a difference, but individual members of the community need to know that, then they can make informed decisions.

### **The Bailiff:**

Does any other Member wish to ask any questions of the Minister? Yes, Senator Routier.

### **3.10 Senator P.F. Routier:**

Has the Minister taken into consideration what is happening in Ireland with regard to minimum wage? There is a proposal that they are going to reduce the minimum wage. Does he have any intention of reviewing Jersey's minimum wage?

### **Deputy I.J. Gorst:**

As the previous Minister knows, minimum wage is currently reviewed on an annual basis. It was not envisaged that it would be initially, but due to the difficult economic conditions, I have requested and they have agreed to do that annual review. I have proposed that there be a 2 per cent increase in the minimum wage for 2011. I think it is fair to say that in Ireland, they did see some quite dramatic rises in the minimum wage, and now what they are finding is that that was out of kilter with the economic conditions that they are currently facing and the difficulties that

they are facing, and it is putting employers off employing. The evidence that has been gathered by the Employment Forum is that that is not taking place within our community. There are always those who want to see the minimum wage lower than it is, but we in this Assembly have a duty to ensure that it is a fair and appropriate minimum wage, and I believe that the proposal that we will be debating with regard to that in the New Year is fair and appropriate. I hope that Members will support it, but it will be reviewed again next year to ensure that it continues to be fair and appropriate.

**The Bailiff:**

Very well, that concludes questions to the Minister for Social Security.