

4.4. Deputy G.P. Southern of the Chief Minister regarding the delivery of ‘real’ jobs for the unemployed:

Will the Chief Minister provide details as to how he plans to deliver ‘real’ jobs for the unemployed, what groups are to be targeted, how much funding is required, where that funding is to be found, and whether other projects will now be cut or postponed.

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

As has been publicly announced a cross-departmental task force has been established. All of the work that they undertake has the clear aim of providing every Islander with the opportunity to enter the workforce. A number of areas are being investigated, including the expansion of the training courses and work placement schemes, which are already providing people with the skills and confidence to find work. The team is also consulting with Island employers and industry representatives to make sure that any plans and combination of incentives put in place both in the short and the long term will have an effective and positive impact on the job market. For this to work we must have a partnership between the private and public sector with a common goal of finding work for Islanders. The Minister for Treasury and Resources has assured the Council of Ministers that appropriate funding will be made available to allow the departments to concentrate on the tasks that lie ahead. We are all aware that public finances are tight but I have argued and will continue to argue that we cannot afford not to bear these costs now if we are to avoid long-term damage to our society. I am not aware of any project which will suffer as a result of these proposals.

4.4.1 Deputy G.P. Southern:

So, that answer says he is not going to provide any details in particular. Can the Chief Minister inform Members when he will come to the House with a detailed plan and will he, at this stage, give an estimate of how much money he thinks may be required, because the figures from his written question, 6614, suggests that up to £9 million might be needed in income support.

Senator I.J. Gorst:

Of course I have announced the task force, the work is in hand, we have agreed to increase the capacity of the existing schemes - the Advance to Work and the Advance Plus - we know that there are more people waiting to go on there and extra places at Highlands. When I made the public announcement after conversation with the Minister for Treasury and Resources we talked there about possibly using around £4 million of underspends but that is of course on top of any extra capacity required within income support, which will be provided via automatic stabilisers as we have been doing throughout this economic downturn, but more details will be forthcoming as we are able to firm-up schemes during the course of the next few weeks.

4.4.2 Deputy M.R. Higgins:

The one thing that is missing from what the Minister has said is the timetable. We have all known that we have had an unemployment situation of 1,300, we have had the under-25s heavily dominating the unemployed and we have people who basically will never, ever get another job and whose futures are quite bleak. Why do the Ministers not already have plans in place, especially knowing that the fulfilment industry is also likely to follow with another 1,000 unemployed? So, I would like to know what your timetable is and let us start rolling this programme out.

Senator I.J. Gorst:

We are working on this as our top priority, as I have said. As I have just said in answer to Deputy Southern’s question, we will be bringing forward more details in the course of the next few weeks. We are liaising with employers to see where the capacity is that we will be able to place people from one industry directly into another one. The Deputy is absolutely right, the pressures are only increasing. Despite what is happening in fulfilment unfortunately we expect that the number of unemployed is going to rise in the short term and that is why it is absolutely right that this is our top

priority. I would not be quite so bleak as the Deputy. We cannot allow people to be unemployed and have no vision for the future for themselves. The challenge is for Government to upskill, retrain, help to place these people so that they do have a future and not so that we write them off.

4.4.3 Deputy J.A. Hilton of St. Helier:

The Chief Minister in his response talked about a common goal of finding work for Islanders. Yesterday I was in the Social Security office on behalf of 2 constituents when I could not help but notice and hear approximately 3 individuals registering for work in the space of 5 to 10 minutes. It may be I misunderstood the situation but the distinct impression I gained from this was that these were people who were new to the Island. What measures, if any, will the Chief Minister take to safeguard jobs for local people?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

Of course it would not be right for me to comment on the individual circumstances because I did not overhear that conversation either, however, let me be frank. This is a very difficult area and one which has to be handled sensitively, but right at the core of this back to work programme is liaising with employers, understanding their need for non-local employees, and working carefully with them and upskilling and ensuring that jobs available in the economy are provided to people who are already in our community. The Deputy is aware of the approved new Migration Law around jobs and housing which this Assembly has approved. The challenge is that we work together with employers to ensure that this matching goes on and people are able to move from one industry to another and that jobs are protected for locally qualified individuals. It is not going to be easy, it is the most difficult route, but it is one that we must deal with and we must deal with as a priority.

4.4.4 Senator L.J. Farnham:

I would like to commend the Chief Minister, the Council of Ministers, and indeed all States Members for getting people back to work. Reducing unemployment is one of the key factors in the forthcoming strategy that has been put together. My question for the Chief Minister is, although it is important to provide jobs for all people, could he confirm that it is his intention to ensure that special attention is paid to creating not just jobs but real career opportunities for our young people?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

The Senator is absolutely right. This is not a single-stage approach. In the short term we need to get those people back to work who are currently unemployed. In the medium and long term we need to be bringing forward apprenticeship schemes, we need to be increasing the vocational courses because this is also a long term approach that we need to start to deliver and develop and we need to make sure that our young people are appropriately skilled, have the confidence to enter the work place for the jobs which are available in our economy, but again these are not easy areas; it will require a change of direction, but it is a change that we must make.

4.4.5 Deputy M. Tadier:

Would the Chief Minister support the concept of an arm band for anybody working in Jersey who does not have 5 years' residency so people like Deputy Hilton can identify them and choose whether or not she wants to use their services?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

Sir, I am not sure that was a serious question which I am expected to answer.

Deputy M. Tadier:

It was, Sir.

Senator I.J. Gorst:

I have said in my earlier answers this is a sensitive area. Members of other communities come into our community and are a great advantage, a mutual advantage to Jersey and those coming from other communities. We should never, never allow it to be about the value that those individuals bring. There are people now within our community who are out of work. Our priority should be to ensure that those individuals here now are provided with work and job opportunities.

[Approbation]

Deputy M. Tadier:

Can I just thank the Minister; although the question was phrased in a certain way that answer needed to be given because I think those words are very important from the Minister.

4.4.6 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

Apropos dealing with youth and indeed adult employment it has often been argued in this Assembly that work permits do not work in a situation of full employment. Does the Chief Minister believe they would work in a situation of unemployment?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

It is difficult for me to give a full answer to such a question in oral answers. The Deputy is aware that we have approved a change to the job and housing law which is going to allow Ministers to review employment licences and a number of locals and non-locals on those licences. We are at the point of preparing for a new Strategic Plan. We need to consider there the population levels that we want, we need to consider that we have the appropriate mechanisms to deliver those levels and protect jobs for people who are already in our community. That rightly, I believe, should be part of those considerations and ultimately should be a consideration for this Assembly, but there are issues and difficulties with whichever approach one might wish to use to deliver those aims.

4.4.7 Deputy J.A. Martin of St. Helier:

It follows on from the Minister quoting the sensitive area that we are in. Could he please pledge that somebody like myself, or Deputy Hilton, or other members of the public, when an elderly... or a youngster leaving school, or somebody who has just come to the Island, needs to go to Social Security that the world and their wife are not listening to their personal details and this is going on and on, and I plead that the Minister will do something. There is room. It is a little bit of moving around but it is the dignity of everybody going down there and this has to be sorted and it can be done very easily. I hope the Minister will take this on board.

Senator I.J. Gorst:

I do hear what the Deputy is saying. There have been concerns expressed. I have to be careful and I do not want to step on the feet of the new Minister for Social Security, and I am sure it is right there as one of the issues which he will be addressing. Of course there have been changes over a number of years around where individuals are seen at the Social Security Department, there are private rooms available, but as I say it really is rightly an issue for Senator Le Gresley to consider.

4.4.8 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Does the Chief Minister have an estimate for the number of fulfilment workers in particular who are likely to be made unemployed who have local qualifications? Because the Social Security Department suggests that at present only one in 5 claim income support and if they are to be made unemployed then most, I presume, will. What estimate does he have of the numbers who will be claiming income support from the fulfilment industry?

The Bailiff:

I have to say this has drifted quite a long way from the original question, Deputy Southern, but if the Chief Minister wishes to reply.

Senator I.J. Gorst:

Thank you, Sir, it is kind of you to notice in this instance. Of course that is not a straightforward question because individuals in the fulfilment industry may have other incomes coming into the household of which they are a part.

[10:15]

I believe that the number of locally qualified for employment purposes within the fulfilment industry is far greater than one in 5; whether their individual circumstances, should they be made unemployed, means that they are going to require income support, extra work is being undertaken by the Social Security Department to understand that, whether there are other individuals in that household which will mean they will not require that support or whether they will require that support.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

Sir, if I may ...

The Bailiff:

No, I am sorry, Deputy, we have had plenty of questions on that topic.