

4. Questions to Ministers without notice - The Chief Minister

The Deputy Bailiff:

We come now to the second question period, which is of the Chief Minister. Deputy Power.

4.1 Deputy S. Power:

The Chief Minister has recently passed chronologically his first 100 days in office. Would he care to give an indication to the Assembly that his new Council of Ministers is an oasis of peace and calm and would he say that the same oasis of peace and calm extends to his relationship with his Minister for Treasury and Resources?

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

In the words of a rather more famous politician, in my first 100 days I am enjoying myself. I do not think that I would be satisfied and entirely happy if I had a Council of Ministers that was an oasis of peace and calm because one of the purposes of the Council of Ministers is to have a robust debate and try and consider every angle before bringing forward a piece of policy or a piece of legislation for approval by this Assembly. I can confirm that we are, indeed, having those robust debates about the future direction of our community and that is right and proper. I am and always have worked well with the Minister for Treasury and Resources when he was Minister for Treasury and Resources before and I was Minister for Social Security, and I continue to have that good excellent working relationship.

4.2 Deputy T.M. Pitman:

Would the Chief Minister agree with me and condemn the comments of his predecessor bar one in suggesting that giving senior civil servants a “get out of your contract card free”, £500,000 golden handshake, justified by possible attacks or criticisms from States Members was completely inappropriate and would he distance himself from that view?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

As a child, one of the lessons that my mother endeavoured to teach me was the principle of “but for the grace of God.” I have no doubt that some of the decisions which I probably already have made and will be called upon to make during the course of the next 3 years, subject to the will of this Assembly, will in hindsight be viewed in a different light from the conditions during which I had to make those decisions. Therefore, I will not rise to the challenge that the Deputy lays before me. As I understand it, the previous Chief Minister said there were good reasons to make that decision at that time and I believe that probably I should leave it at that.

4.3 Deputy J.A. Hilton:

In response to a written question, the Chief Minister very kindly provided some data with regard to Advance to Work and Advance Plus schemes. My question was asking how many of the registered unemployed had been accommodated by States departments on both of those schemes. I was somewhat disappointed to note that in 2011 out of the 15 departments in the Advance to Work only 8 offered placements to people on the Advance to Work scheme. Likewise, in 2011, on the Advance Plus only 7 States departments out of the 15 offered places. Notwithstanding the 100 places that they are currently negotiating, does the Chief Minister believe that the States of Jersey have done enough to offer registered unemployed opportunities in States departments?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

In a word, no. The Advance to Work scheme initially looked for placements that were going to lead to work and, therefore, employers were asked to come forward with placements where there was a good chance that that was going to lead to a full-time job. During the course of the difficulties that we are experiencing, that has changed slightly and the Advance to Work programme has asked for employers to come forward who perhaps are not aware of full-time

employment at the point that they offer the placement but there is value in the placement in itself. One of the first things which the Deputy referred to in her question was that I asked for us to find more placements across States departments. I have set the target of at least 100 additional placements and we are working on that. It might be that there is extra capacity that we can find, but the reason I asked for that additional 100 places to be looked for was because I was not satisfied with the role that we were currently playing. But I believe that we are now correcting that issue.

4.4 Deputy G.P. Southern:

In his most successful - in P.R. (public relations) terms - first 100 days the Chief Minister appears to have yet to come to this House with a statement about any major policy change or policy initiative that he in particular is making. The same applies to many Ministers. It seems to me that the Chief Minister should adopt the habits of his predecessors and whenever possible announce policy initiatives in this House, thereby giving 10 minutes question time to work out what is going on, rather than allow these Members to read in the paper what is going on. Will he do so from now on?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

I will endeavour to do so.

4.5 Connétable D.W. Mezbourian of St. Lawrence:

Following recent revelations regarding the compromise agreement with the former Chief Executive Officer of the States of Jersey, is the Chief Minister as Chairman of the States Employment Board able to update the Assembly regarding the agreement with the former Chief Officer of Health and Social Services?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

Indeed I am. The then States Employment Board signed an agreement with the former Chief Officer of Health and Social Services. That agreement included a monetary value, which was calculated at 6 months' notice in lieu and 6 months' pay, which totalled just over £129,000.

4.6 Deputy J.A. Martin:

It is really a follow on from Deputy Hilton's question and thank you for that answer. My question is - and I hope the Minister will take this on board when now working with Social Security - given the amount of youngsters as well out of work, why are we not working with the third sector? I keep hearing charities crying out for volunteers, but my daughter and all her friends who go down there are not offered or told about this. It would be the ideal place for third sector charities to get some youth on board to help, because some of the charities are coming to an end because of the age of the volunteers. Would the Minister, please, seriously look into this? I think it is absolutely a great opportunity and it should not be missed.

Senator I.J. Gorst:

Yes, I will. The Deputy makes an excellent point. Third sector organisations were, of course, the Minister for Social Security reminds me, invited and took stalls at the jobs fair. I lose track of the days. I find it is a bit of a problem since I have got to this job, but I think it was last week I had a meeting with representatives of the third sector and suggested to them that we, Government and the third sector, needed to have a more co-ordinated approach around volunteers and people that might be able to work alongside them and help them with their work and they have gone away to think about that. They are about to start the process of appointing the third sector forum co-ordinator which is going to help and enable us to really get some traction in this particular area, because I am, and I know the Council of Ministers are, very supportive of the third sector. In actual fact, I see the work that we want to do in Government only being delivered if we are able to work hand in hand with the third sector because of the invaluable contribution that they have to our community. So it is going to be a continuing theme, or I hope it will be, not only coming of the Chief Minister's

Department but from right across Government, with every Minister signed up to recognising their value and to working hand in hand with them.

4.7 Deputy T.M. Pitman:

Obviously, as well as being Chief Minister, the Chief Minister is a Senator representing all the various Parishes of the Island. Over the last 2 weeks both the Constables of St. Clement and St. Helier have been charged by their parishioners, after an overwhelming vote to reject politicians being on the Electoral Commission, with conveying that message to all those Senators and the Deputies. Can the Chief Minister confirm that he has received that message, that the public of St. Helier and St. Clement do not want politicians sitting on the Electoral Commission?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

I was just trying to do a quick check with the Connétable of St. Helier as to whether the results of that meeting were emailed directly. I do not recall seeing that email. However, of course, there was publicity in the *Jersey Evening Post*, for which I thank them. The Connétable of St. Clement did indeed refer to, if I recall correctly, the Deputies and all Senators the results of the meeting that took place in his Parish.

4.7.1 Deputy T.M. Pitman:

In light of the overwhelming response that those 2 Parishes did not want people sitting on the Electoral Commission, will Chief Minister be withdrawing his very ill-considered former support for having politicians on that Electoral Commission?

[11:30]

Senator I.J. Gorst:

I know the Deputy is excited to get to the debate that we will be having later today and to know what the contents my speech might be. However, I will not give in to that temptation to put him out of his misery in that respect.