

2.14 The Deputy of St. Ouen of the Minister for Economic Development regarding comments made by the Assistant Chief Minister with responsibility for External Affairs to the Guardian newspaper in relation to the issue of independence for Jersey:

Was the Minister involved in any discussions with the Assistant Chief Minister with responsibility for External Affairs and/or the Chief Minister prior to the comments made by the Assistant Chief Minister to the *Guardian* regarding the issue of Jersey's "independence"?

Senator A.J.H. Maclean (The Minister for Economic Development):

A straightforward answer to the Deputy's question is no.

2.14.1 The Deputy of St. Ouen:

Could I ask the Minister whether anyone in the industry has raised concerns regarding the matters reported by the world media and what is being done to address this issue?

Senator A.J.H. Mclean:

Yes, there have been one or 2 concerns raised to me from senior members in the financial services industry. Members will not be surprised that when such matters appear in the national newspapers it does raise concerns. In particular it raises and creates uncertainty, which is something we can ill afford in this current economic climate. This does appear to be an unfortunate case where, as we have already heard today, the Assistant Minister made comments to the *Guardian* newspaper, which were taken out of context. It perhaps demonstrates to all of us the dangers of talking to certain publications.

2.14.2 Senator S.C. Ferguson:

Does the Minister agree that during this time of economic uncertainty any statements which could potentially cast any doubt upon our political stability and/or our reputation should only be made by the Chief Minister directly?

The Deputy Bailiff:

That is not a matter, is it, that falls within this Minister's responsibility?

Senator S.C. Ferguson:

He is affected by it because I think he has just said that the finance industry has not welcomed the comments that have been made, therefore, does he not agree that such statements which will affect his industry should only be made by the Chief Minister?

Senator A.J.H. Mclean:

I did not say the industry did not welcome it. I simply said that they raised concerns wanting clarification as to whether it was true or not. I think the Chief Minister has made it clear today, on several occasions, that the matter of independence is not on the agenda. It is not under consideration by the Council of Ministers and that is the fact of the matter. As far as who should or should not make statements, clearly Ministers speak to the media on a number of different subjects and a range of different questions can be asked, quite often unexpectedly, and in that respect one has to answer and it is a very difficult situation. I can understand the difficulties the Assistant Minister faced when he was talking to the *Guardian*. As far as the Chief Minister and whether he should answer questions solely, I do not think that is necessarily practical but it is a matter for the Chief Minister and the Council of Ministers to consider.

2.14.3 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

The Minister said that feedback from the industry was such that they did not necessarily not welcome it. Would he say whether they did welcome statements of the Assistant Chief Minister?

[11:30]

Senator A.J.H. Mclean:

I think there is a little bit of twisting of words going on here. **[Laughter]** So goodness knows how that might well be reported in due course as we twist one way and then the other. To make it hopefully absolutely crystal clear, one or 2 senior members of the finance industry did raise the issue with me to see if there was any truth in the matter that this was being considered by the Council of Ministers. I confirmed that it was not on the agenda of the Council of Ministers and they were relieved to hear that.

2.14.4 Deputy T.M. Pitman:

Does the Minister agree that from his perspective at Economic Development, as the Assistant Chief Minister has spent half an hour on this already and we have got 6 questions left to answer, there is nothing more to be said really?

Senator A.J.H. Mclean:

I would hope so.

2.14.5 Deputy M. Tadier:

Could the Minister explain... because he has just told us that he gave a reassurance to senior finance industry individuals that there was no truth that this was on the agenda of the Council of Ministers, yet the Assistant Minister told us that the reason he told the *Guardian* about the preparations for independence was because it was Council of Ministers' policy both now and in the past. So can the Minister for Economic Affairs give some clarification as to which one is correct?

Senator A.J.H. Mclean:

I think the Deputy is misquoting what the Assistant Chief Minister said earlier on.

Deputy M. Tadier:

That is not an answer. I can reiterate that and I am not misquoting and if I am would he say in which way I am misquoting so he can correct me?

Senator A.J.H. Mclean:

I am happy to clarify yet again, following the Chief Minister and the Assistant Chief Minister, that the matter of independence is not on the agenda of the Council of Ministers.

Deputy M. Tadier:

It is not on the agenda but it is okay for the fellow Minister, if you like, to say that we are preparing for independence to a U.K. newspaper and of course with the consequence that a headline is produced saying "Jersey seeks independence", but it is not on the Minister's agenda. Is that what the Minister for Economic Affairs is telling us?

The Deputy Bailiff:

Deputy, that really is not a matter for the Minister for Economic Development, it is a matter you can put to the Chief Minister in Questions without notice in a moment.

2.14.6 The Deputy of St. Ouen:

Is the Minister confident that initial concerns raised over this issue by industry have been fully addressed?

Senator A.J.H. Mclean:

I think that this matter has had such an airing today and I certainly hope if it is reported accurately then I am sure that the industry will feel very relieved and satisfied that the matter has been put to bed, and that is that independence is not on the agenda of the Council of Ministers.