

## **7. Questions to Ministers Without Notice - The Chief Minister**

### **The Deputy Bailiff:**

Are there any further questions? Well, that brings questions without notice to the Minister for External Relations to an end and we start questions for the Chief Minister. Senator Ferguson.

### **Senator S.C. Ferguson:**

Could I be next, Sir? You caught me unawares.

### **Deputy J.A. Martin:**

Could I just clarify something? You did not tell anybody in the House that the extension to this urgent question or statement would be taking the whole of the question time of the Chief Minister yet you have added on the people [**Aside**] ... the Chair has advised after the questioning that there was still X amount of lights on and they would be first to ask. That is why Senator Ferguson has been taken unawares. My question to the Chair is, this has never happened before and I am not very happy because I could have had a different question for the Senator which I did not want to ask under the question and I will be put to the bottom of the list.

### **The Deputy Bailiff:**

I certainly do not like you to be unhappy, Deputy, but all I was suggesting was that those Members who would have been unhappy that they did not get their questions in to the Chief Minister earlier will have the opportunity of doing so during Questions Without Notice. I am going to start Questions Without Notice now. Deputy Le Hérissier.

### **7.1 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:**

Apropos Planning, would the Chief Minister agree that it would be advisable that practically every application be referred to the Planning Applications Panel, thereby allowing the Minister to concentrate on strategic issues and deal only with the most exceptional of cases, as was the underlying reasoning behind the Code of Conduct?

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

Yes, I do agree with that. I am of the view that the Planning Applications Panel should make the first instance decision on planning applications and the Minister should be used in the appellant process.

### **7.2 The Connétable of St. John:**

Given the total fiasco that we have had since November/December over the Minister for Planning and Environment and the way it has been dealt with, and which I believe the Chief Minister falls short of the position he holds, is the Chief Minister now considering resigning from this position or is he going to wait for a vote of no confidence to be brought in him?

### **Senator I.J. Gorst:**

No I do not intend to resign. I have been quite clear that the process whereby the Chief Minister appoints and removes Ministers is not fit for purpose. It needs to change. The P.P.C. (Privileges and Procedures Committee) sub-committee for a number of months considered improvements to the Executive and to the Scrutiny function and I hope that we can get those improvements in place in short order. Of course, the Connétable did not even vote for me to take this office in the first instance.

### **7.3 Deputy J.A. Hilton:**

During the past few weeks, I have written to the Chief Minister several times requesting a meeting between himself and a constituent of mine regarding a States Employment Board matter. Can the Chief Minister give me an assurance that he will respond to me and arrange that meeting within the next 5 working days?

**Senator I.J. Gorst:**

As I understood it, officers had asked for a meeting to be set up. If that is not the case, then I will make sure it is. In this particular case, of course, both myself and the Deputy Chair of the States Employment Board know the constituent and up until this point, we had always removed ourselves from any consideration of it but we are quite prepared, as we have said, to hold a meeting with the Deputy to go over what the issues are although we have not been involved in them personally at any stage up until now.

**7.4 Deputy M. Tadier:**

Following on from this whole episode of Duhamel-gate, will the Chief Minister agree that rather than making the case for giving more powers to the Chief Minister, this whole episode teaches us that we should be maintaining the status quo of the Assembly being able to hire and fire Ministers so at least the individuals, when their integrity is brought into question, can be done in the open rather than on the whim of a Minister, who we have seen did not necessarily have the facts to follow through on a dismissal?

**Senator I.J. Gorst:**

If we were to do that and we were to maintain the current position, then I fear we would find ourselves in exactly the same position that we have been in today and over the last fortnight and one thing, whether Members of this Assembly supported the dismissal or did not, it is quite clear that all Members that have approached me have said the system is terrible and it has got to be changed. Had we had a changed system where the Chief Minister could appoint and dismiss Ministers and importantly had we had collective responsibility around the Council of Ministers' table, I do not believe we would have been in the position that we are in today. The issues could have been dealt with in a much more productive way than we have had to.

**7.4.1 Deputy M. Tadier:**

The current Chief Minister is a self-confessed fan of consensus politics. There is no assurance that any future Chief Minister would operate in a consensual way and therefore there is nothing to ensure that a future Chief Minister would act in a fair and open way. Does the Chief Minister accept that it is a relevant safeguard in a non-Party context that the Assembly should be able to choose, hire and fire its Ministers and decide and put the people in place who can work together as a team and then fire and remove them if that is not being done?

**Senator I.J. Gorst:**

I thank the Deputy for his question. I was not sure whether it was praise or being critical in light of the phrase that he just used to describe the dismissal vote and its withdrawal. Building consensus is difficult. Taking disparate political views and trying to develop the way forward is difficult. The Chief Minister without the ability to hire and fire and without collective responsibility tries to achieve that with, in effect, one hand tied behind his back. It is far easier to build consensus and to develop a way forward in the best interests of Jersey when an appropriate structure is in place and appropriate power tempered by the Assembly is in place to allow the Minister to ensure that consensus is reached.

### **7.5. Senator S.C. Ferguson:**

Following the question of the Deputy of St. Ouen this morning, is it not appropriate that any Minister who is involved with a financially sensitive operation of any sort should not meet with counterparties except with officers present and will the Chief Minister include that stipulation in a ministerial Code of Conduct and if not, why not?

### **Senator I.J. Gorst:**

That code is being reviewed. It seems like a very sensible suggestion. Ministers should meet with officers. We are not individuals and members of our community sometimes see us as personalities. We are the officers. We are functioning as officeholders and therefore we should have appropriate support and advice with us.

### **7.6 The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

Following the statement made by the Minister for Treasury and Resources last week regarding the saving of £75 million between now and 2010. Could the Chief Minister inform this Assembly what discussions have taken place at the Council of Ministers regarding the level of savings proposed and whether or not the Council of Ministers support the view expressed by the Minister for Treasury and Resources?

### **Senator I.J. Gorst:**

Those comments which were in the media at the end of last week arose, as I understand it, from a conversation about the Minister for Treasury and Resources' forward work programme during the course of this year. As Members of this Assembly would expect, Ministers are starting to think about the next Medium-Term Financial Plan, Treasury are doing income and expenditure projections for the medium term. We have not yet got to the stage where it has come to the Council of Ministers for consideration. But it is a piece of work that must be done as already departmental cost increases are likely and we need to make sure that they are managed.

### **7.7 The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

What conversation does the Chief Minister plan to have with the unions who obviously are certainly concerned about the statement by the Minister for Treasury and Resources if, as the Chief Minister states, this has yet to be discussed by the Council of Ministers?

### **Senator I.J. Gorst:**

The numbers are not firm at all. I have not seen those numbers. But the work needs to be undertaken. We said right at the start when we started talking about reform of the public service that one of the aims and reasons that we were doing it was to make sure that we did not continue to see the growth in expenditure that we have seen over a number of years. We need to do this carefully and in a considered way; and that is exactly what we are doing. That is why we are rolling out the Lean process to look at how we can deliver services more efficiently. That is why we are looking at terms and conditions and modernising the workforce structure, because we know that we have pressures in the Health Service that we are going to have to fund into the future; and therefore it has to be done in a joined-up and appropriate fashion. That is what this long-term income and expenditure projection will start to consider and will help Ministers and in due course will help Members of this Assembly to decide what sort of future we need.

### **7.8 Connétable M.J. Paddock of St. Ouen:**

I wonder if the Minister could address the Assembly on a subject that I am sure is dear to many Islanders' hearts, to take the subject away from talking about ourselves, of how he feels the economy, the housing and the unemployment is of the Island. His personal view; how we are progressing with this.

**Senator I.J. Gorst:**

I thank the Connétable for that question because it is very, very important. If we look at the latest Business Tendency Survey then we start to see that certainly in the financial services sector it is the most optimistic about the future that they have been since 2009. We know that there is a lot of work being done by the Economic Development Department to continue to deliver economic growth. We have the new Innovation Fund; we have the new Skill Strategy which is a joined-up approach; Education and Social Security as well. We have the Enterprise Action plan trying to deliver jobs as well. We have Jersey Business working together with Locate Jersey trying to grow the economy, trying to stimulate the economy. We have the Town Team looking at retail and how that is developing, and with regard to getting unemployed Islanders back to work, the work that Social Security is doing is largely unacknowledged in this Assembly, but it is great work.

[15:00]

Over the course of last year 1,500 people were put into and found full-time jobs. That is more than the year before. We plan to continue to do that and to continue to invest in delivering jobs for Islanders. The Connétable also knows that the work that the Minister for Housing is doing will start to see fruition. We are grateful for the Corporate Services Scrutiny Panel looking at the ability of the Minister for Treasury and Resources to loan money to the new Housing Corporation to start delivering ...

**7.9 Deputy M.R. Higgins:**

This is a speech, not an answer.

**Senator I.J. Gorst:**

The Minister for the Environment is bringing forward amendments.

**The Deputy Bailiff:**

Chief Minister, the answers are to be crisp and succinct.

**Senator I.J. Gorst:**

But it was a very important question - it does not have a brief answer, Sir. I shall finish on this. The Minister for the Environment is bringing forward changes to the Island Plan to help on the supply side of housing as well, which is also critically important. I see the Minister for Health and Social Services. I have to mention the work that she is doing in transforming the Health Service and bringing forward a new hospital to the benefit of all Islanders.

**Deputy M. Tadier:**

Could I ask for a copy of that speech to be circulated via e-mail?

**7.9.1 Deputy M.R. Higgins:**

The Chief Minister has made a great play about the importance of collective responsibility and Ministers working together. Yet he operates a Council of Ministers where all Ministers are not involved in all decisions. He has almost a kitchen cabinet of 2 or 3 Ministers who are consulted on other issues. Others are expected to vote for their policies but are not involved in the discussion. Does he not feel that before he gets the power to hire and fire Ministers he

must include all his Ministers in the decision making so we get better government with more views being considered?

**Senator I.J. Gorst:**

Different Ministers are included in different decisions on a day-to-day basis as it involves their portfolio. All big decisions come to the Council of Ministers for decisions by the Council of Ministers because, as I have said before, we have something called the Financial Services and External Relations sub-group which gives political lead to matters around financial services and external relations and includes those Ministers that one would expect to be involved in those decisions.

**The Deputy Bailiff:**

Before I call on Members who have already asked questions, Deputy Martin, I understood you had a question to ask the Chief Minister. **[Laughter]**

**7.10 Deputy J.A. Martin:**

My point was I may have had a different issue and we have drifted into different issues, but I will go back now to the extension of the questions. Would the Chief Minister confirm that the original proposition brought by the Deputy of St. Martin and signed by 3 other Back-Benchers was not representative of rampant building in the Island? They had not met secretly or openly with developers and this was an absolute camouflage about 25-year old storage of asbestos to get the Minister for Planning and Environment out for quicker rampant decisions to build, build, build and not good decisions that he always does.

**Senator I.J. Gorst:**

I do not for a minute believe that that was the purpose of the 4 individuals that brought forward the vote to dismiss the Minister. They outlined their decisions in their report. I have met with them privately and I know that they are disappointed that I have taken the action that I have. But I believe that the action I have taken is right and I do not believe that trying to attribute such motives to those gentlemen is fair or reflective of what their motives were.

**7.11 The Connétable of St. John:**

This morning I raised a question with the Minister for Treasury and Resources about 136 of 2010 where it clearly says: "To request the Minister for Treasury and Resources to bring forward for approval development agreements in respect of the Esplanade Quarter for endorsement by the States prior to any commencement of any works on that site." That had been adopted. Will the Chief Minister make sure that does come to the House, anything with the Esplanade Quarter, prior to the work being commenced? Yes or no?

**Senator I.J. Gorst:**

I am sure the Minister for Treasury and Resources answered his question perfectly adequately and I have nothing to add to it. Here we have a perfect case in point of why the system needs to be reformed.

**The Connétable of St. John:**

The answer is "no" then.