

2020.07.13

3 Deputy G.P. Southern of St. Helier of the Minister for Social Security regarding benefit cuts: (OQ.201/2020)

Will the Minister advise whether, as a result of any discussions by the Council of Ministers, she is considering moving away from the “red lines” she has laid down in respect of changes to benefits; and will she maintain a commitment not to cut benefits this year?

Deputy J.A. Martin (The Minister for Social Security):

I thank the Deputy for his questions. No, I am not moving away from my red lines and, yes, I will maintain a commitment not to cut benefits for this year.

3.3.1 Deputy G.P. Southern:

A commitment not to cut, does that contain the possibility of a freeze?

Deputy J.A. Martin:

The Deputy asked me something similar in a written question of today. The red lines are there that I have and it all depends on further discussions and policy discussions with the Council of Ministers and I am not committing to either way on that one yet.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

Either way on that being reduce or freeze.

Deputy R.J. Ward of St. Helier:

I had asked for a question in the chat to follow up from Deputy Southern.

The Deputy Bailiff:

Maybe my chat has ... I have not got anything. Sorry, my chat is not showing any questions at all.

Deputy J.A. Martin:

I think there is one from Deputy Ward and Deputy Alves as well.

The Deputy Bailiff:

Sorry, my chat is not functioning properly. Forgive me, I will have my chat looked at.

3.3.2 Deputy R.J. Ward:

Thank you, I know this is not an easy situation. Can I ask the Minister whether given that the COVID-19 response will go over a number of years in terms of economics is one of her red lines that there will not be reductions in future years in social security?

Deputy J.A. Martin:

To clarify to Deputy Southern, it was no cuts and I cannot talk for future years, we are literally talking about what we are doing for next year. I cannot commit to new Assembly Members, new Ministers for Social Security. COVID, the Deputy is right, it will have a knock-on effect for many years.

3.3.3 Deputy R.J. Ward:

In terms of social security payments, has the Minister considered to ease the burden on those people who may have longstanding repayments of overpayments that was not their own fault? This would be one way to improve their lives at this time of considerable need.

Deputy J.A. Martin:

The Deputy has asked me this question about overpayment. No, every case can be considered, it can be a very minimum amount but at the end of the day I am recollecting taxpayers' money, which has just gone through the roof.

Deputy C.S. Alves of St. Helier:

Deputy Ward asked my question so no, thank you.

The Deputy Bailiff:

My chat is still frozen. Does anyone else have a question before I ask Deputy Southern for his final supplementary?

3.3.4 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Will the Minister maintain index-linking or even raise benefits above the R.P.I. (retail price index) in order to compensate better for income distribution inequalities?

Deputy J.A. Martin:

Again, the Deputy wants me to commit to something that is still up for discussion. The Deputy knows it is still up for discussion and, again, the bill is just getting bigger. More and more people. I do not know what is going to happen next month, next week, so I cannot commit to that. I am very sorry.