

2.17 Deputy A.T. Dupré of St. Clement of the Minister for Health and Social Services regarding the impact of his recent comments on those with suicidal tendencies or coming to terms with bereavements:

Notwithstanding his apology to the Assembly, does the Minister appreciate the hurt that his comments have caused to those people who have suicidal tendencies or who are trying to come to terms with bereavement from suicide?

Senator J.L. Perchard (The Minister for Health and Social Services):

I thank the Deputy for this question and an opportunity to reaffirm my position. Last year during a private conversation outside this Chamber, I directed an improper comment suggesting self-harm to another States Member. I snapped and I reacted improperly at the Member after being repeatedly provoked and provoked and provoked. I am very sorry I said what I did and I repeat my unreserved apology to States Members and to the people of Jersey. This apology of course extends to anyone with mental health or emotional difficulties and those who may have thoughts of self-harm or suicide. I recognise as well as my apology, that it should be extended to families and the loved ones of those with mental health problems and those that have committed suicide. My commitment to supporting those who provide high quality, evidence-based mental health psychological services is a priority. I assure Members that my unfortunate comment made last year has re-intensified my desire to demonstrate this commitment.

2.17.1 Deputy A.T. Dupré:

Does the Minister realise how many people on this Island are now asking for your resignation?

Senator J.L. Perchard:

No, I do not realise how many people on this Island are asking for my resignation, nor does the questioner.

2.17.2 Deputy M. Tadier:

I do regret the tone of that last answer but first of all let me just say that I think the whole of the House welcomes the apology that was given last night in public. That notwithstanding, does the Minister acknowledge that any words will remain simply words and any apology will remain hollow, certainly as perceived by the public, so long as the Minister doggedly refuses to tender his resignation?

Senator J.L. Perchard:

I do not accept that at all. That is a position taken by some, including the Deputy I assume, and I do not accept that. I have made a mistake. I said something last year in a private conversation that has been used widely now and quoted widely. I regret it immensely. I apologise; I intend to move on and learn from that and ensure that the lesson is put to the benefit of the mental health services and I am committed to ensuring our mental health services are properly resourced and it is a priority for me. I have learned a lesson.

Deputy M. Tadier:

Purely to clarify, I am not saying one way or the other what my position is, I am purely reiterating as Deputy Dupré has mentioned that there is a vast outcry from the public on this issue and it does not seem to have been satisfactorily dealt with.

The Deputy Bailiff:

So were you asking another question?

Deputy M. Tadier:

It is not a question, it is purely a clarification. I can tack a question on to the end of it, if you like.

The Deputy Bailiff:

Very well, I am afraid time has now expired on ...

The Deputy of St. Martin:

Can I ask that we suspend Standing Orders to allow the completion of this question and the one question remaining? I would like to propose that Standing Orders be suspended.

The Deputy Bailiff:

Very well, you are proposing the suspension of Standing Orders to allow the questions to finish? Seconded? **[Seconded]** Very well, the appel is called for in relation to whether to suspend the Standing Orders to continue Question Time until the end. I invite Members to return to their seats and the Greffier will open the voting.

POUR: 24		CONTRE: 14		ABSTAIN: 0
Senator S. Syvret		Senator T.A. Le Sueur		
Senator P.F. Routier		Senator P.F.C. Ozouf		
Senator B.E. Shenton		Senator T.J. Le Main		
Senator S.C. Ferguson		Senator J.L. Perchard		
Senator A.J.D. Maclean		Senator B.I. Le Marquand		
Connétable of St. Lawrence		Connétable of Trinity		
Deputy R.C. Duhamel (S)		Connétable of Grouville		
Deputy of St. Martin		Connétable of St. Brelade		
Deputy J.B. Fox (H)		Connétable of St. Martin		
Deputy J.A. Martin (H)		Connétable of St. John		
Deputy G.P. Southern (H)		Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier (S)		
Deputy of St. Ouen		Deputy J.A. Hilton (H)		
Deputy of Grouville		Deputy S.S.P.A. Power (B)		
Deputy of Trinity		Deputy I.J. Gorst (C)		
Deputy S. Pitman (H)				
Deputy K.C. Lewis (S)				
Deputy of St. John				
Deputy M. Tadier (B)				
Deputy A.E. Jeune (B)				
Deputy of St. Mary				
Deputy T.M. Pitman (H)				
Deputy A.T. Dupré (C)				
Deputy A.K.F. Green (H)				
Deputy J.M. Maçon (S)				

The Deputy Bailiff:

Very well, so we return to Question 17. Senator Syvret?

2.17.3 Senator S. Syvret:

It was not my intention to participate in this question, but I am afraid the Senator has again imputed the implication that I did not quote accurately or honestly the remarks he made to me in the Assembly. Will the Senator acknowledge that, in fact, what he terms: "The private conversation that took place last year" in fact took place in the presence of at least 2 other people at a public press conference and that he did, in fact, in the matter in question in this Assembly, instruct me to: "Go and top myself"?

Senator J.L. Perchard:

I am not sure that is related to the original question. However, I will answer it. The Senator, on a daily basis, distorts facts and writes his version of the truth on his website and I am not prepared to try and ... why should I have to defend myself, we just have to read his website daily, he will distort the evidence ...

The Deputy Bailiff:

Senator, can we just come back to you answering the question, rather than ...

Senator J.L. Perchard:

Yes, well, I am not even sure what the question was, quite frankly.

Senator S. Syvret:

I am happy to clarify it. I stated quite unambiguously what it was that the Minister said to me in this Assembly. The Minister persists in attempting to avoid that issue and duck around it. Will he confirm that he told me to go and top myself in this Chamber?

Senator J.L. Perchard:

I did not, but as I was not aware that was his question, I did not. I did whisper some unpleasantries in his ear in response to something that he had, just moments before, said to me and I refute his version of what was said and I maintain the position that I totally refute his version of what was said.

Senator S. Syvret:

This is a serious matter. The Minister is accusing me of lying and in fact I ...

The Deputy Bailiff:

No, no, Senator, I am sorry, there is a difference of statement as to what was said. That does not necessarily impute lying. People in court remember conversations differently every day.

Senator S. Syvret:

Well, he is having exactitudinal difficulties with the actuality, if I might use that phrase then. He told me to go and top myself. That is the phrase that he used to me and I would entirely happily affirm that under oath in a court of law, as I think would probably a few other Members.

The Deputy Bailiff:

Very well. Deputy of St. Martin?

2.17.4 The Deputy of St. Martin:

I can appreciate the difficulty the Minister finds himself in and I am quite happy to say that I did vote for him because I did have his confidence. However, would he not consider probably the best way forward is to offer his resignation and stand again? That way he would test the mood of the House to see whether, in fact, the Members still have confidence in him?

Senator J.L. Perchard:

I had not considered doing that, no.

2.17.5 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Since the Minister contests the wording used, will he inform Members what he did say without the expletives?

Senator J.L. Perchard:

Senator Syvret's interpretation of what was said is not the same as mine and that is all that needs to be said except I know what I did not say.

2.17.6 The Connétable of St. Martin:

We have heard the apologies in this Chamber, we have heard the apologies in public on the television news and will the Minister demonstrate his intent to improve the mental health services by some measurable means that, in the future, we can say: "Yes, he is contrite and he has improved the services in the mental health situation"?

Senator J.L. Perchard:

I give Members my commitment that I will make every effort to prioritise the support given by me and my Assistant Ministers to the mental health services and that we will endeavour to not only improve but completely upgrade and we do need to be looking at the whole St. Saviour's Hospital site as to whether it is even suitable. I did mention at the time of my election that I will be bringing forward a plan for Overdale, which I would like to see include a state-of-the-art acute mental health facility which could be paid for by the sale of St. Saviour's Hospital. Yes, I am committed. I did not realise until quite recently that Jersey suicide rates are statistically higher than they are in the U.K. and so we have real issues here. I am committed and perhaps, I hope, Members will agree some good will come out of this in the sense that the sensitivities around this whole situation, perhaps I was not aware of. I said something flippant and stupid and I really regret and something good will come of this, I hope. I stand to be judged by that.

2.17.7 Deputy A.T. Dupré:

Could the Minister tell the House if he would be prepared to undertake an anger management course?

Senator J.L. Perchard:

Yes, I would, I would. But when provoked to a level and you say something ill-considered and flippant, I am not sure whether that is anger or stupidity. I think probably I was stupid. But I would be quite happy - the experience would be very useful - to undertake that course, because I have undertaken all sorts of courses already in my role as Minister for Health, S.P.E.L.D. (Specific Education Learning Difficulties) training, for example, Autism Jersey, some very interesting courses, and yes, one learns from that.