

5.1 Deputy M. Tadier of St. Brelade of the Chief Minister regarding the Chief Minister's policy position on a referendum for the role of the Speaker: [1(522)]

Is it the Chief Minister's policy position that the question of the States Assembly electing its own Speaker should be put to a public referendum; and, if not, why not?

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

The decision as to who should serve as a speaker of the States Assembly is, in my view, one that should be taken by the Members of this Assembly.

5.1.1 Deputy M. Tadier:

Is it then the case of the Council of Ministers that this should be put to a referendum given the fact that one of his most senior Ministers has lodged an amendment, albeit not to his proposition but to mine, saying that there should be a referendum on this issue? Is the Council of Ministers divided on this fundamental issue of democracy?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

The Council of Ministers is made up of independent Members of this Assembly and it is divided on many, many issues. It should not come as a surprise to any Member of this Assembly. It is on the public record that I hold a particular view on this matter and how it should be decided. It is also on the public record that other senior Ministers hold a completely contrary view.

5.1.2 Deputy J.A.N. Le Fondré:

Given that the Assembly has previously expressed its view that a referendum on this most important issue is appropriate why is the Chief Minister not willing to let the public express their view on this most important matter, which is a constitutional change and wipes out 800 years of history?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

The Deputy well knows that those people who do not wish to see this Assembly electing its own Speaker want a referendum. It is the democratic norm around the globe that parliaments elect their own Speaker, whether that be one of their own Members, which is the majority position, or a member outside of the Assembly. That is what I am proposing. That is why I do not think there needs to be a referendum. The States well know that the questioner has a different view.

5.1.3 Deputy J.A.N. Le Fondré:

Supplementary. The Minister did not clarify why he did not think the public should have the right to support this change as opposed to the individual who may or may not eventually be elected.

Senator I.J. Gorst:

The public will. We are elected to this Assembly to make decisions. I hope that Members of this Assembly in due course, later this year, will agree to elect their own Speaker. Those Members who vote for that proposal will then have to face an election in May of next year, and the public, I have no doubt, in making their vote during that general election will consider how Members voted on a whole range of issues, not least the election of a Speaker to this Assembly.

5.1.4 Senator S.C. Ferguson:

Will the Chief Minister explain why he has not spoken on this matter with Guernsey, our representatives in London, the Privy Council and even our own Bailiff?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

It is a matter for this democratically elected Assembly to decide who it elects as Speaker. That is the democratic norm around the globe. Members cannot ignore that fact. Of course they can say that they are not prepared, do not want to make that change, because they think tradition and history outweighs that global democratic norm, but it is us, it is we who are elected who ought to make that decision, not push it off to some other consultation with some other body outside of this Assembly. **[Approbation]** That is not what we are elected for. We are elected to make decisions in the best interests of Jersey and that is what I am asking this Assembly to do in due course.

5.1.5 Senator S.C. Ferguson:

Would it not be at least polite to speak to these people about what he intends to do rather than just issue a diktat, as he has done.

Senator I.J. Gorst:

Democratic norms across the United Kingdom, across the Commonwealth, across the globe, cannot be considered when presented to this democratically elected Assembly as a diktat. It is a question that the Assembly needs to ask itself and address which of those 2 outweighs the other; the global democratically accepted norm or our traditions? That is the question we are going to have to face. I support this Assembly democratically electing its speaker in future.

Senator S.C. Ferguson:

Would it not be polite, Chief Minister?

The Deputy Bailiff:

Senator, you have already had a supplementary.

5.1.6 Deputy S.Y. Mézec of St. Helier:

Does the Chief Minister agree with me that when the Island is facing so many challenges the question of who presides in this Assembly being put through a referendum, when it frankly will not capture the imagination of most of the public, would be an imprudent waste of money when this Assembly is more than capable of deciding who presides over this Assembly?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

This Assembly has a woeful record when implementing the results of referendum. The only time we have implemented it, I think in recent history, is when the referendum asked members of the public whether they wish to retain Constables in the States. That required no change, so of course we accepted that result, we did not have to do anything. But when the public asked us to make a change and do something we put it into the “too difficult to do” box, and we did not make a change. Let us not make that mistake again. Let us get on and be masters of our own destiny in line with the global democratic norms that we see. As I said, not only in the United Kingdom but across the Commonwealth.

5.1.7 Deputy J.A.N. Le Fondré:

Is it not ironic, Chief Minister, that those who have used the words “democratic” a number of times in the words used today refused to recognise that it might be the ultimate test of democracy to take it to the public, particularly when this Assembly has already expressed the view there should be a referendum on this matter? Why is the Chief Minister ignoring that particular vote?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

The questioner, I am surprised, persists in such a question when he himself voted against the results of a public referendum when it comes to electoral reform. **[Approbation]** He knows he did. Now he is trying to say: “Let us have a referendum” and I fear if we have another referendum Members of this Assembly will simply ignore it because it will not agree with their preconceived ideas on the issue.

Deputy J.A.N. Le Fondré:

Point of correction, I did support the results of the last referendum.

The Deputy Bailiff:

There are no points of correction.

5.1.8 Deputy A.D. Lewis of St. Helier:

On this question, would the Chief Minister, as he says he wants to support full democratic norms, would he also support the full principle of full party politics, which is also a peculiarity of our Assembly?

The Deputy Bailiff:

I think that goes outside the ambit of the question that is asked which was specifically about a Speaker, so I do not allow that question.

5.1.9 Deputy M. Tadier:

That is a shame because that was going to be the gist of my last question, which I think I can relate. But let me start off and see at which point it falls out of order. The Chief Minister will be familiar, no doubt, with the quote from Abraham Lincoln, given that their political biographies are so closely intertwined **[Laughter]** when he said: “A House divided against itself cannot stand” and given his admission in the first answer that he gave to the Assembly, that the Council of Ministers is deeply divided, not just on this issue but on many issues, does he agree that in order to provide proper leadership in the future, whoever the Council of Ministers are, should stand on a political party ticket to make sure that the public can have confidence?

The Deputy Bailiff:

That is the point it dropped out of being relevant, Deputy, I am afraid. **[Laughter]**

Deputy M. Tadier:

That on the issue of the separation of powers, which is what we are debating, and on other issues, they can have full confidence in whichever government ...

The Deputy Bailiff:

I am sorry, Deputy, I cannot allow that. If I did not allow the first one I cannot allow that.

Deputy M. Tadier:

I will withdraw that and simply thank the Chief Minister for his answers.