

# STATES OF JERSEY



## PUBLIC ELECTIONS: VOTING ON SUNDAY 16TH OCTOBER 2011

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Lodged au Greffe on 15th March 2011  
by Deputy T.M. Pitman of St. Helier

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STATES GREFFE

## **PROPOSITION**

**THE STATES are asked to decide whether they are of opinion –**

- (a) to agree that the ordinary elections for Senators, Connétables and Deputies should be held on Sunday 16th October 2011 and not on Wednesday 19th October 2011;
- (b) to request the Privileges and Procedures Committee to bring forward for approval the necessary Regulations under Article 17(2)(a) of the Public Elections (Jersey) Law 2002 to give effect to the decision.

DEPUTY T.M. PITMAN OF ST. HELIER

## REPORT

Deputy Southern's suggestion that Wednesday 19th October 2011 – the date of Jersey's first so-called 'General' election – should be designated a public holiday to encourage as many members of the public to vote as possible is, I believe, one that should be considered without the prejudice that appears to exist all too often with proposals from backbenchers: he is, after all, talking about an additional public holiday that would in reality come about only once every 4 years.

Nevertheless, given the likely objections being raised purely on apparent economic grounds, should Members feel unable to support Deputy Southern's proposition, yet still genuinely wish to ensure that we as government do our utmost to bring about the highest participation possible at the 2011 election – and, indeed, all subsequent elections – I believe that the option of moving the election forward just 3 days from the proposed Wednesday 19th to Sunday 16th October is a very viable alternative.

Such a move would largely eliminate the concerns of the business fraternity with regard to the impact on business profits and staff wages inherent in making Election Day a public holiday. Similarly, given the hugely reduced number of those finding themselves trying to balance the demands of a working day, family commitments, etc. against their wish to play a part in the democratic process, the impact upon increased turnout figures would be likely to be very similar to that achieved if the day had been designated a public holiday.

It is recognised, of course, that there may still be some objection on the grounds that for some Sunday remains a religious day. However, in answer to this I would suggest that many other institutions, for example, shops, public houses and other entertainment amenities, already open for business that is of a significantly less important nature than the election of a government to oversee the Island's affairs. Such objection should therefore not in my view distract from the very real potential a Sunday election could hold for increased voter turnout.

In making this proposition I also acknowledge that the possibility of moving Election Day from a weekday to a Saturday was given some consideration by the Working Group looking at reform and election matters last year. In seeking the views of both Jurats and the Comité des Connétables, potential areas of possible concern were highlighted as being the need to consult with staff – many who give their time on a purely voluntary basis – and any possible costs that would arise.

To this regard concern was also highlighted that if the election was to take place on a Saturday (this being the day the Working Group considered rather than the Sunday), the Comité noted that if some counts were deferred to the following day (due to the need to potentially count Senator, Connétable and Deputy votes), staff and volunteers might need to work on a Sunday as well as the Saturday. Adoption of this proposition would obviously alleviate this problem as any deferred counts would be completed on a weekday – just as will happen if the 2011 election goes forward on the proposed Wednesday.

It must be clear to all that, just as with reform and democracy generally, there is likely no one perfect solution that will find everyone's support. Nevertheless, given the Working Group's conclusion – supported by the Jurats – that a weekend election did offer real potential for increasing voter turnout, I believe that moving the 2011 election forward just 3 days is one that we should consider very seriously. Though

there may well be some additional costs involved, viewed against that of going a step further to make Election Day a public holiday these are comparatively negligible.

When also set against the potential benefits of any government elected having the mandate of a significantly increased percentage of the population, I personally believe that this is a trial well worth undertaking – even more so when considered in conjunction with the raised profile likely to be achieved with Island’s first ever ‘General’ election. As such, I would urge Members to support the proposition if they feel unable to support Deputy Southern’s proposal to designate the day a public holiday.

### **Financial and manpower implications**

As Deputy Southern states in his proposition, an additional public holiday would be funded from departmental budgets; further still, that in the past the estimated cost to the public sector of a bank holiday is likely in the region of £1.5 million. Without the Connétables’ advice on any possible costs likely to be incurred by the Parishes (as indicated above) it is impossible to set an exact figure on the option that I propose as an alternative. Hopefully such advice could be gathered and forthcoming in time for a debate, although I would be surprised, given the long-established voluntary nature of much of the work surrounding local elections, that the cost of the additional overtime, etc. would exceed more than a few £1,000s across the parishes.

It can certainly be said with absolute confidence that adoption of this proposition to hold the election on a Sunday would have nothing like the cost inherent within the creation of a new public holiday. I am nevertheless required by Standing Orders to give my own ‘estimate’ of the possible financial and manpower implications. Possibly of even greater consideration, I would suggest, is the long-term benefit of greater support that would be achieved for subsequently formed economic policy given the increased mandate of those elected. This, in my view, could equally only lead to greater efficiency in government.