

5. Questions to Ministers Without Notice - The Chief Minister

The Bailiff:

So we then move on to the second period, which are questions without notice to the Chief Minister. Constable of St. Helier.

[11:45]

5.1 The Connétable of St. Helier:

Could the Chief Minister tell us when we are going to have sight of the *Napier Report*, which is now extremely overdue, and could he also tell us how much that report has cost so far to produce?

Senator T.A. Le Sueur (the Chief Minister):

Yes, I have now received a copy of the *Napier Report* and I have also shared a copy in confidence with the Deputy of St. Martin. We have a couple of concerns about it which we wanted to talk about. The Deputy has been away for a week, but now that he is back, Sir, we will be talking together and hope to update Members by or before the next meeting.

5.1.1 The Connétable of St. Helier:

The cost of the report?

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

I have asked my officer to ascertain the cost. I do not at present have a figure.

5.2 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Can the Chief Minister point to any signs of the recession ending, any signs of economic growth, whether it be in the housing market, retail, the unemployment figures or business confidence figures at all? Has the recession ended? Are there any signs of it at all?

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

I think there are various signs of encouragement that the recession is coming to an end, but certainly not anything to say that the recession has ended. There is new business confidence, there are new business activities coming forward, there has been quite a bit of diversity in that respect, but they are, I say, fragile shoots rather than clear shoots of recovery. But I am optimistic, and I remain optimistic, as long as we nurture those shoots and continue to encourage new business growth, we will continue to see our good path out of the recession back to a situation of greater economic activity.

5.2.1 Deputy G.P. Southern:

A supplementary, if I may. In which case, does he feel it is appropriate to further cut by £65 million public services, with the accompanying redundancies, which will further depress the economy?

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

Absolutely, and those will take place in 2012 and 2013, by which time I am hopeful that the economy will indeed be showing more positive signs of recovery than it currently is. That is why we are managing it in an appropriate way, with limited activity in 2011, and greater activity in 2012 and 2013.

5.3 Senator T.J. Le Main:

For some of us unintelligent Back-Benchers, I wonder whether the Chief Minister could explain to the Constable of Grouville and myself exactly what the *Napier Report* is all about, or what is it supposed to do?

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

I am sorry, it is quite a long time ago now, but it was a report commissioned to investigate the suspension of process of the former Chief Officer of Police, to be carried out by a Q.C. (Queen's Counsel) from the U.K. called Mr. Brian Napier.

5.4 Deputy M.R. Higgins:

As the Chief Minister is essentially the head of the board for the Council of Ministers, can he explain to the House what the Council of Ministers growth policy is, because we have been led to believe you do not have a growth policy, and also if he can explain which sectors of the economic he expects to recover first.

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

The growth policy is one which has served the Island well over the years, and that is maintaining a highly-trained workforce in a competitive tax environment with good regulation and good policing of that. In terms of the second part of his question ... sorry, I have forgotten what it was now.

Deputy M.R. Higgins:

I was asking which sectors of the economy he expects to recover first.

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

The Statistics Department now does a business tendency survey, that gives detailed information on a variety of issues and I do urge the Deputy and others to take note of that. The indications are that the finance industry, followed by the construction industry, are the first ones to show real improvement in that respect. That information is updated quarterly and I look forward to the next quarter's figures, which I hope will confirm that trend and I urge the Deputy to read them when they come out.

5.4.1 Deputy M.R. Higgins:

A supplementary, Sir, yes. Would the Chief Minister not agree that as this was a financially-induced recession that it will take longer for the finance sector to get back to the levels that it was prior to the recession? Secondly, although the industry itself from a profitability point of view may be doing better, the policies that they are pursuing by not lending to small and medium businesses are not conducive to growth of other areas of the economy?

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

I am not a fortune-teller, and I would not like to predict how long it might take to get back to former levels of activity in finance or anywhere else, and indeed, it may well be that we do not regain our former levels of activity, and that is why, quite rightly, we are taking steps to restrain States spending in order to continue to have a balanced economy which will further encourage the economic growth that the Deputy and all of us would want to see happen. I cannot indicate on particular sectors of the economy, because they are all at the moment in a very uncertain, fragile state, which we need to encourage and support, so I cannot do any more than that to help the Deputy.

The Bailiff:

I think there was an aspect of the Deputy's question about the sort of lending the banks were doing.

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

Well, one has to take comfort from the fact that interest rates are low, but business prospects, business cases have to be properly made. One of the drawbacks in the past perhaps had been a willingness for banks to lend too easily, and that may have been part of the contribution to the

downturn that we have seen. I think banks are learning from that, but where there is a good business case, I am satisfied and bankers have satisfied me that they are prepared to lend on good business cases.

5.5 Senator J.L. Perchard:

The States have a centralised human resources department and policy. The H.R. function of the States of Jersey, in my opinion, is quite rightly the subject of much criticism, both from inside and outside this Chamber. Does the Chief Minister agree that the H.R. function of the States of Jersey is operating below par, and will he undertake to do something about this, particularly in light of the opportunity that would be provided if the States endorsed the Breckon proposals for more Ministerial support, or more support for the Minister, and perhaps have a States Member with a designated responsibility of H.R.?

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

It is certainly true that we have a more centralised H.R. function, but we do have H.R. activities also in certain large departments of the States. Is there scope for improvement in the H.R. function? There is scope for improvement in all our departments, and part of any C.S.R. process is to ensure that those improvements are encouraged and new methods of working further that improvement. Whether, if there was a change in the government structure, there would be in future a Minister for human resources, I rather doubt it. I think one can have Ministers for this, that and the other. What I would prefer to see in an efficient organisation are fewer Ministers rather than more. That is a personal view.

5.6 Senator S.C. Ferguson:

Given the various H.R. matters that were raised in question time this morning, will the Chief Minister, as Chairman of the States Employment Board, confirm that he will look at these matters more closely and come back to the House with recommendations?

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

I will certainly look at them more closely, although I have to say that what we have here is a situation of clinical judgment. We are talking about the particular cases raised earlier today. The suspension policy is quite clear, that we want to encourage staff to get back into the workplace as soon as possible, but recognising that that is a managed process. In the management of that process, it is only right that the clinical experts in those fields, whichever field it may be, have an input into the progress of that activity. I am disappointed that it appears to be taking longer than I would have liked for that to happen, but I am no clinician, and all I can do is inquire and press, as the Senator suggests, and see if that will generate some action. Ultimately I do not want to second-guess experts in their particular field.

5.6.1 Senator S.C. Ferguson:

Will the Minister look at the administration side of this coming back to work that appears to be the area where there has been a lack of support and assistance?

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

At this stage, I am not convinced where the lack of support, if any, may have arisen. One needs to look at the administration side and the clinical assessment side and any other factors which might affect this issue, so it will take more than just a quick look. It will be a more serious and in-depth approach required.

5.7 Deputy M. Tadier:

Will the Minister join me in congratulating the organisers of the Branchage Film Festival, which is in its third year, to all those who organised it for putting on a splendid show. Does the Chief

Minister also acknowledge its cultural impact for good in Jersey as well as its role in promoting Jersey positively abroad and contributing to diversity in the economy?

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

Absolutely, Sir, I am more than willing, and indeed, welcome the question from Deputy Tadier. Branchage is a good example of an innovative idea which is growing all the time and is also growing in quality as well as quantity. I think it is also a good indication that what perhaps started off with a bit of seed corn capital ultimately is able to stand on its own 2 feet, and in fact I am sure continues to grow, particularly with the enthusiasm of all concerned, both on the Island and outside the Island. So I thank all those who contributed to the success of this year's Branchage - and indeed, the previous one - and I hope this will continue for many more years to come and grow further.

5.8 Deputy A.E. Jeune:

When the Chief Minister responded to Senator Ferguson's question about centralised H.R. function, we do not have a real centralised H.R. function, as the Chief Minister identified. Would he agree to looking at bringing in all the satellite H.R. departments and having a proper centralised H.R. department? Thank you.

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

There often appears to be a benefit in having all staff under one roof dealing with a particular issue and I accept that, but human resources is very much an issue where you need to be in contact with your staff at relatively close quarters, and so while in generality policy and so on can be centralised and administration can be centralised, day-to-day contact with the employees may in many cases be better off nearer to what one might call the coalface. So I do not think it is a case of not having anyone in those particular areas, but policy certainly does need to be and is centralised.

5.9 Deputy C.H. Egré of St. Peter:

As the Chief Minister is aware, the Corporate Service Sub-Panel reviewing the setting up of the States of Jersey Development Company has requested on 3 occasions particular information which they require to complete their review. Despite the fact that the panel has given assurance that this information will be held confidentially, it has not been made available to us. Would the Minister please make that information available to us?

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

It is a matter of ongoing correspondence between the Deputy and myself, because what seems to be happening is that every time we think they are coming to the end of this review, a further question gets asked on a topic, when really what we thought we were reviewing this time was simply the consolidation of previous matters. I am in ongoing correspondence with the Deputy and I hope we can find a satisfactory resolution to the matter, but I do suggest that this is getting to the case where no matter how much information is produced, there will still be more required.

5.9.1 The Deputy of St. Peter:

A supplementary. The Chief Minister is aware that the requests that have been made for specific information have been over the last month and we do feel that this so-called extended failure to provide the information is not based on a short-term, short-thinking basis. Would he please make that information available?

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

I will make available any information which I believe is relevant to the review of the States of Jersey Development Company. I am not convinced that the information sought by the panel at

this stage is relevant to that particular review, but I am quite happy to continue talking to the Deputy in that respect.

5.10 The Deputy of St. John:

Would the Minister give serious consideration when we debate the reform of the States in the next few days or weeks to supporting a name change which I am proposing, whereby currently scrutiny panels are not held in the highest esteem, but also so that we can raise the stakes, shall we say, or the standard of the work and the way it is produced to supporting a name change to call them select committees from scrutiny panels.

[12:00]

Senator T.A. Le Sueur:

What is in a name? What I am interested in is it improving the way in which we carry out our business? If part of those improvements require a name change then I am sure the Members of the Assembly will debate that. I have said, and I repeat, that I am satisfied and supportive of the proposals put forward by Senator Breckon and I think it is important that we look at the general principles of those proposals, rather than the detail of particular name for a committee or a Senator or any other person. Those are secondary to the main thrust, in my view, of improving the way in which we go about our business.

The Bailiff:

Well, I am afraid that brings questions to the Chief Minister to an end.