

## **6. Questions to Ministers without Notice - The Chief Minister**

### **6.1 Deputy G.P. Southern:**

In the light of the Chief Minister's written assurance that an up-to-date due diligence on Harcourt will be done before any progress is made on the contract for the Waterfront, will he assure Members that the ratio of peak annual construction costs to company turnover levels will be included, along with an independent assessment of Harcourt's total property portfolio estimated by them to be £1.1 million and a proper examination of the hotel assets and their values and the illiquidity - the illiquidity - of the assets of Harcourt.

### **Senator F.H. Walker (The Chief Minister):**

All such aspects will be covered by the due diligence and, indeed, other reports and will be made available to States Members and will be made available to the public. Further than that, in the event that the development agreement with Harcourt is still wished to be signed, in that event - as will then the bank guarantees - there will also be a full review made of the legal cases both in Dublin and Nevada by an independent lawyer also made available to States Members and the public. Finally, the Comptroller and Auditor General is to undertake a review of W.E.B. (Waterfront Enterprise Board) corporate governance and a review of whether or not W.E.B, itself acted properly in the whole circumstances leading up to and during the debate. All that information will be made available to States Members and to the public.

#### **6.1.1 Deputy G.P. Southern:**

Supplementary if I may. Since the Chief Minister has taken the question wider in his answer, can he also include a statement about why the economic impact assessment conducted by the Economic Adviser was considered confidential and was refused to me on the night before the debate?

### **Senator F.H. Walker**

The report the Deputy has referred to was made public in 2005 at the Waterfront Forum and there is no reason, indeed, why he should not have it. Can I just refer back to his previous question? He mentioned the illiquidity of Harcourt. I believe he is not accurately reflecting the content of the PwC report but, of course, as I have already said that will be the subject of another due diligence report by PwC which he and other Members will have: it will be made fully available.

### **Deputy G.P. Southern:**

May I have a supplementary?

### **The Bailiff:**

No, I want to move on.

### **Deputy G.P. Southern:**

But the Chief Minister has questioned what I have said and I wish to quote from the report itself, the very words.

### **The Bailiff:**

I will come back to you. I saw Deputy Mezbourian.

## **6.2 Deputy D.W. Mezbourian:**

In the recent report on early years' produced by my panel, we made a recommendation that the Council of Ministers should consider the appointment of an Assistant Minister with clearly identifiable cross-departmental overall political responsibility for children. We consider that to be one of the most important recommendations that we made, however the response that we have

had from the Education Minister is that he is waiting for the publication of the *Williamson Report* before this will be considered by the Council. I therefore ask the Chief Minister when we can expect the publication of Mr. Williamson's report and, when it has been published, will he confirm that our recommendation will be considered by the Council?

**Senator F.H. Walker**

I can confirm that the Council takes this extremely seriously and that it will be seriously discussed by the Council when the *Williamson Report* is available. That report is now expected to be available at the end of this month. In fact we have gone further than merely considering - I say merely - an Assistant Minister and have given some consideration to appointing a Minister with responsibility for children. But given the limits on the number of Ministers under the States of Jersey Law we can have that may be difficult. But we are taking the matter extremely seriously.

**6.3 The Deputy of St. Mary:**

From an exchange of e-mails to all Members recently it seems that there is some question as to whether the Scrutiny review into the importation of bovine semen will be finalised in time to be presented before the debate scheduled for 15th July. Will the Chief Minister advise whether he would be prepared for this matter to be debated in the autumn and, if not, advise the reason for the urgency? Thank you.

**Senator F.H. Walker**

This is a matter - and has been already - of discussion between the Scrutiny Panel Chairman, Deputy Ryan, and the Privileges and Procedures Committee, because it is clear that the Scrutiny Panel is struggling with the work in order to enable us to have a debate on 16th July. Deputy Ryan has asked P.P.C. (Privileges and Procedures Committee) whether it is possible to hold an additional debate the following week, i.e. 23rd July. That has been considered by P.P.C. but I have spoken to the Chairman and he has quite rightly said that is a matter for Members. I reiterate though previous comments, I would be extremely concerned - as would the industry or the majority of the dairy industry - if no debate takes place and no decision is reached before the summer break.

**6.3.1 The Deputy of St. Mary:**

Supplementary, Sir. Given that the importation, if it is allowed - if the States do agree it - Sir, would not be an overnight instant quick fix for the industry, could he please elaborate what the urgency is that this debate take place before the autumn?

**Senator F.H. Walker**

It is very simple. It is the livelihoods of dairy farmers and I consider that to be important both to them and to Jersey.

**The Deputy of St. Mary:**

I am sorry but I must press the Chief Minister on this, I cannot see what difference 2 months would make, Sir, when industry people themselves are saying this would take several years, perhaps even up to 10 years to change the industry significantly?

**Senator F.H. Walker**

I think, with respect to her, the Deputy is missing a vital point. If the dairy industry in Jersey is to have a future, most dairy farmers, certainly a significant number of them, need to make significant capital investment in the future of their businesses. They have been stalling on making that investment now for many months because of the debate on the importation of semen. I do not believe it is realistic or acceptable to expect them to go on stalling when their livelihoods, as I have already said, are at stake.

#### **6.4 Deputy G.P. Southern:**

In reference to a previous answer from the Chief Minister he appeared to suggest that I was misrepresenting the comments of the PwC report. Does he accept that the report itself says: "However, caution should be exercised as the bulk of the group's asset base is not liquid"?

#### **Senator F.H. Walker**

That is one of the comments made in the PwC report and the Deputy - not for the first time - is quoting very selectively. Sir, I do not intend to go into this in detail this morning. The Deputy has put it forward, we have various votes, we have rescindment motions, votes of no confidence, votes of censure in just about everybody and everything and I will be answering all these points in full during one or more of those debates.

#### **6.4.1 Deputy G.P. Southern:**

Can the Chief Minister assure Members that he will get a response - comments - back to those particular propositions in good time for the debate and not on the day?

#### **Senator F.H. Walker**

We will get the comments to Members as soon as we possibly can. Of course we have limited time anyway, and I am not complaining about that, because of the shortness of the lodging period in these instances but, yes, of course, we will get comments back to Members as soon as we possibly can.

#### **Deputy G.P. Southern:**

Is that a yes or a no before the debate, Sir?

#### **Senator F.H. Walker**

It is as soon as we possibly can, Sir.

#### **6.5 Deputy C.J. Scott Warren:**

In view of the earlier question regarding the possibility of an Assistant Minister for Children, could the Chief Minister give his opinion in view of the belief by the Minister for Planning and Environment that there is at times a conflict between the 2 roles of being a Minister for Planning and a Minister for Environment? Would the Chief Minister agree that it is worth examining the possibility of an Assistant Minister or an all-out Minister for the Environment? Thank you, Sir.

#### **Senator F.H. Walker**

That has not seriously been put to me and not discussed by the Council of Ministers. I personally do not see that there is such a great conflict which would justify the appointment of an additional Assistant Minister. Again, we are number constrained under the States of Jersey Law and I think frankly the issue of children ranks somewhat higher on the importance scale than this one.

#### **6.6 Deputy S.C. Ferguson:**

While we are talking about Ministers for Children and so on, have the Council of Ministers not given any consideration to Ministerial representation for the aged in the Island? Now, there is in the U.K. general evidence of abuse of old age pensioners whether in homes or in a home circumstance, and perhaps the Ministers should be casting their eyes upon that. I would point out the somewhat minor case of abuse where the old age pensioners who are house-bound and cannot get out are being deprived of their milk deliveries through economic circumstances. Would the Chief Minister like to comment on that?

#### **Senator F.H. Walker**

This issue, just as the issue of Assistant Minister for children, has arisen in the past and again it is another thing that I and, I think, the majority of Ministers would very much like to establish. The problem is we are limited under the States of Jersey Law to 12 Assistant Ministers, for reasons I support, and if therefore we were to appoint an additional Assistant Minister it would mean that some other duties currently covered by Assistant Ministers would have to fall. Either that or we add significantly - and it is a very significant issue - to the portfolio of an existing Assistant Minister which may be attractive and may be possible but it will not necessarily be easy.

**6.7 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:**

Can the Chief Minister confirm that in the light of recent events he is totally happy with the role and the performance of W.E.B.?

**Senator F.H. Walker**

At this particular instance, no, I cannot. I am, to say the least, annoyed that I have been portrayed as either being an idiot for not checking my facts or being dishonest in misleading the States. I am far from happy from the information I was provided with before the debate took place. I have asked serious questions both of Harcourt and of W.E.B. to which I have not yet received the full answers and I will be in a much better position to give not just the Deputy, but the States generally and the public my assessment and my recommendations when I receive the answer to those questions. [Approbation]

**6.8 Deputy J.A. Martin:**

Much has been made about the limitations of having a Minister - probably - for the elderly and a Minister for Children, would the Chief Minister not consider then that all Ministers and Assistant Ministers with their great large portfolios already should be absolutely 100 per cent first a States Member and have no other employment outside this House and then they could maybe cover [Approbation] their great big portfolios they give themselves? Thank you, Sir.

**Senator F.H. Walker**

I do not really see the point of that question. I think if States Members have other employment and have had other employment before they were appointed as Ministers or Assistant Ministers and declared that, which I am sure they did, it is unreasonable to expect them suddenly to give it up. I am very confident with the application level of my Ministers; I am very pleased with the application level of my Ministers, others may not be but I am, and I am very pleased with the general level of application by Assistant Ministers.

**6.9 Deputy G.P. Southern:**

In his answer on page 14 of the written answers, the Chief Minister states clearly: "I have not denied access to any reports by the Economic Adviser on the Waterfront." Does he then deny that on the morning of the debate he has told me that the report that I requested from the Economic Adviser was confidential and he could not release it to me?

**Senator F.H. Walker**

Yes, it was in essence a confidential report but I was in error when I said that to the Deputy. It has already been put into the public arena and is therefore, of course, absolutely available to the Deputy and other States Members.

**6.10 Deputy J.B. Fox:**

In light of the questions this morning about the elderly and young people and Ministers and Assistant Ministers, will the Chief Minister or the Council of Ministers be reviewing the Assistant Minister's role at this time to be able to look at ways of improving the coverage that does not exist at this time?

**Senator F.H. Walker**

The role of Assistant Minister and the relationship between Assistant Ministers and the Council of Ministers has not developed as far or as comprehensively as it should have done, and I regret that. There have been numerous discussions on how it can be improved, that is still being worked on. I regret that the issues that the Council of Ministers has had to deal with in recent months - not least Haut de la Garenne and now, of course, the Waterfront issue - have delayed a number of other projects which we would very much have liked to have done but time has just not made it possible. But I have not forgotten the Deputy's strong interest in the role of Assistant Ministers and I do assure him that action will be taken in the shortest possible timescale.

**The Bailiff:**

That concludes the second question period of the Chief Minister.