

5. Questions to Ministers without notice - The Chief Minister

5.1 Deputy J.A.N. Le Fondré:

Just to return to matters regarding the Bishop of Winchester, does the Chief Minister consider that either the Anglican clergy or the States of Jersey can retain any confidence in the Bishop who it appears distorts in the eyes of the truth what appear to be matters of a personal agenda? Will he identify to the pastoral visit with whom he is meeting that such concerns have been expressed both in this Assembly and in the wider community?

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

Sometimes I wonder whether I am empowered to speak on my own behalf, let alone on behalf of every Member of this Assembly the way the current law is written. As I said earlier to the Deputy's question, I am aware of the deep disquiet and the concerns, certainly with regard to some of the ways the diocese perhaps, and the Bishop, being more particular, has acted. I will be taking those issues up with the pastoral visit and the 2 Bishops undertaking that visit.

5.2 Senator S.C. Ferguson:

Would the Chief Minister advise Members whether he intends to alter the constitution of the Jersey Appointments Commission and, if so, when? If he does, would he elaborate on the reasons for change?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

I was asked this question, I think, last time in questions without notice and my answer has not changed.

5.3 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

It is an extension on what I asked him previously. Would the Chief Minister not acknowledge that this continuing debate about the States of Jersey and the Bishops that, firstly, it does a disservice to other churches on the Island who are also performing a vital role, if one is of their persuasion? Secondly, would he not accept that the logical way to deal with it is to have a proper separation of church and State so that we can focus on the real issues that have arisen?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

I would not and do not take that view. I look forward to the Deputy lodging his proposition which is going to suggest that we in this Assembly are going to disestablish the Church of England from the Crown.

5.4 The Connétable of St. John:

Could I have the Chief Minister's view on his Ministers filibustering when it comes to answering questions as we have just seen previously with his predecessor who was on his feet? Thank you.

Senator I.J. Gorst:

I did not take a record of how many questions the Minister for Social Security managed to get through but it seemed to be a reasonable amount. Perhaps I could carry on his answer. If I am not mistaken I think he was going to congratulate the work of the Jobs Fest, the number of people who have got into work for that period, the number of employers that have engaged and we hope that those jobs will continue and become permanent. I think it is an excellent scheme and I think we should be considering schemes like it out into the future.

5.5 Senator S.C. Ferguson:

Would the Chief Minister explain to the Bishops, and particularly the Bishop of Winchester, that his demands on local churches for money are grossly unfair given that the local communities upkeep the local churches and it is not incumbent upon the established church to in fact upkeep their own churches?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

I cannot speak, as you kindly reminded me, on behalf of the Bishop of Winchester ...

The Deputy Bailiff:

But this is what you were asked, whether you were going to say it to him.

Senator I.J. Gorst:

I can simply say I know that the Bishop of Winchester is aware of that because I have explained it to him on a number of occasions in the past in the same way that I did to this Assembly, and why I believe that the association between church and State is so important and an integral part of our parochial system.

5.5.1 Senator S.C. Ferguson:

The Chief Minister has not answered my question. Would he explain to the Bishops that the local communities upkeep the churches? It is not the church establishment that has to; my rates pay for my local Church of England church. I do not begrudge it as a Methodist but [Laughter] I feel that some of the demands made by the U.K. on the local churches are grossly unfair. Will he please explain it to them?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

I have to visiting Bishops in the past and I will continue to do so. Perhaps we ought to mark the occasion when Senator Ferguson finds that levies upon her are acceptable and she is pleased to pay them.

5.6 Deputy M. Tadier:

Does the Chief Minister agree that we live in an increasingly cosmopolitan society where the Church of England does not have a monopoly on the religious expression or belief of the more general populous? If we are to continue in this very archaic way of having a designated religious person in the States Assembly, then we should also consider extending that to those of the Muslim, Catholic, Hindu and Humanist faiths, or non-faiths, as it may be, so that we can also create some spaces for an Imam, for a Humanist and for a Canon perhaps of the Catholic church to be able to express their views in this Assembly on behalf of their individual communities.

Senator I.J. Gorst:

I may not agree entirely with all that the Deputy said but I think his sentiment is a fair one: that we are a welcoming community, that we are a community made up of individuals and communities of differing religious opinion. We should welcome that and not find it something the reverse of. Having said that, we are a community with a long Christian heritage and we should not throw that out or seek to change things without good reason. The Deputy may not be aware, perhaps it was before he was elected to this Assembly, but I brought an amendment to the then Deputy of St. Martin's proposal to review the non-elected positions of this Assembly which withdrew the role of the Dean from that review. The Assembly at that point agreed with me and my position has not changed.

5.6.1 Deputy M. Tadier:

The Chief Minister said that we are an Island with longstanding links to the Church of England; relatively speaking, not that long in terms of history. Does the Chief Minister agree that as an Island historically we have got much greater and longer-lasting links with Pagan tradition and by that logic we should be therefore appointing some kind of druid to speak on behalf of the greater Island's cultural heritage in this Assembly and not the privileged status of a very elite Church of England? [Laughter]

Senator I.J. Gorst:

I think I said everything that I needed to say in answer to the first question. I would simply say that I used the term "Christian" and not any specific denomination.

5.7 Deputy G.C.L. Baudains:

I wonder if the Chief Minister could advise us whether he has come to any conclusion regarding his Minister for Planning and Environment and if not whether he might consider seeking advice from the Bishop when he meets him. [Laughter]

Senator I.J. Gorst:

The thought had not occurred to me, which is an interesting one.

Deputy G.C.L. Baudains:

Perhaps he would consider answering the question while he is at it.

5.8 Deputy M.R. Higgins:

Changing the subject entirely, can the Chief Minister tell me the state of the discussions with Guernsey regarding bringing in lower duties on cigarettes which were revealed to the public on the Politics programme, I think, by the Assistant Minister for Treasury and Resources? Does he feel that it is right that we are not only putting the price up but then going to make things difficult for them by not allowing them to bring cigarettes in that are duty-free?

[16:45]

Senator I.J. Gorst:

It is not an issue that I am close to so that I could answer with any authority. However, it is an issue which will be discussed and raised by the Minister for Treasury and Resources tomorrow during the Budget debate.

5.9 Deputy J.A. Hilton:

Does the Chief Minister agree with the editorial about the budget in today's *J.E.P. (Jersey Evening Post)*? Does he also agree with me that it is a little bit misleading to quote a figure of £500 million for the development of the hospital when in fact we will be debating a figure of around £290 million?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

I am a politician that is more relaxed about what I read in the media than perhaps some other Members of the Assembly. I did not agree with the sentiment of the editorial perhaps until we got to the final paragraph which seemed to indicate, contrary to the preceding number of paragraphs, that it was the right budget for Jersey at this time because we will be putting money back into the pockets of lower and middle earners, will be investing in infrastructure for the future, will be creating a hospital that we can be proud of where we know that Islanders will be getting the care that they deserve, that we will be dealing responsibly with

providing social housing into the future and that we will be dealing with our waste in an appropriate manner. I think that this Budget is the best Budget that I have ever seen since I have been elected to this Assembly and I am proud and I am grateful for the work that the Treasury and Resources Department has put in in bringing forward this Budget. **[Approbation]** Perhaps I hope that tomorrow's editorial may reflect that rather than the sentiments reflected today.

5.10 Deputy S.G. Luce of St. Martin:

Tomorrow some growers from Guernsey are in the U.K. making representations about the possible reintroduction of L.V.C.R. (Low Value Consignment Relief) for their home-grown products. Since I asked the Chief Minister this question a few weeks ago, could he tell us whether he has made any inquiries or had any discussions with either Guernsey or the U.K. on this matter recently?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

Tomorrow there is an All-Party Parliamentary Channel Islands Group meeting of which Jersey is a part and Senator Bailhache will be attending representing Jersey at a political level. As part of those meetings there is also going on showcasing of particular industries and sectors in Jersey and in Guernsey. The Guernsey Growers Association are represented and will be showcasing the work that they do and that is the context in which they will be raising that particular issue.

5.11 The Connétable of St. John:

Will the Chief Minister review the immigration policy given that non-E.U. (European Union) citizens have to have work permits yet E.U. Member States have free movement to Jersey but not necessarily have free movement to the U.K. and work permits?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

We have only recently agreed the new Control of Housing and Work (Jersey) Law 2013 and as we said at the time it needs to be given time to work. I think we are already seeing it work from the questions that I had and the answers that I was able to give earlier today. Therefore, it does not seem to me that now is the appropriate time to review that work as it has only just come into legislative force.

The Connétable of St. John:

A supplementary?

The Deputy Bailiff:

There are 3 Members to go, I think we will not get to you, Connétable. Deputy Le Hérissier.

5.12 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

Given the relatively short tenure of our recent Human Resources Directors and presumably given the fact we are now searching for a new one, could the Chief Minister tell us how he intends to deal with this and whether he feels the process being put in place will lead to a much more stable position?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

As I said when the Deputy asked a very similar question at the last sitting, we are fortunate to have recruited prior to the departure of the Human Resources Director, a deputy director from on-Island from the private sector who was an excellent candidate in I.T. and is currently in

the acting role. I see no reason why that particular person should not carry on into the future and do a very good job on our behalf.

5.13 Deputy G.C.L. Baudains:

The Chief Minister failed to answer the first part of my previous question: what is his current position regarding the Minister for Planning and Environment?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

Sorry, perhaps I should apologise for the flippant response that I gave but it was too good to miss with regard to the Bishop giving me advice. As I have said, and said at the last States sitting, it is only right when issues come to light that a proper process should be followed. That process is being followed and those concerned should be given time to consider and to make their case. We are in the middle of that process now. I hope to be in a position to speak more publicly about that within the next 10 days or so.

The Deputy Bailiff:

That brings questions without notice to an end. There is nothing under J and nothing under K. Can I just give notice to Members that P.157, Machinery of Government: committee system has been lodged by Deputy Baudains and P.158, Access to Justice in Jersey: review has been lodged by the Chief Minister.