

STATES OF JERSEY



ELECTORAL REFORM

**Lodged au Greffe on 11th January 2007
by Deputy G.P. Southern of St. Helier**

STATES GREFFE

PROPOSITION

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

- (a) to agree that –
 - (i) the age at which a person should be entitled to vote in public elections should be reduced from 18 to 17;
 - (ii) eligibility to register to vote in public elections should no longer be linked to length of residence in Jersey but should be an automatic entitlement to every resident as soon as he or she is registered in the population register to be created under the Migration Policy as approved by the States;
 - (iii) a system of registration of political parties be created;
 - (iv) a system of the regulation of election expenses be introduced;
 - (v) details of the party affiliation of candidates of a registered political party and the party logo be permitted on ballot papers;
- (b) to charge the Privileges and Procedures Committee to bring forward for approval the necessary amendments to the Public Elections (Jersey) Law 2002, and to prepare for approval any other necessary legislation, to give effect to the proposals in time for the 2008 elections.

DEPUTY G.P. SOUTHERN OF ST. HELIER

REPORT

Eligibility and Registration

The reduction of the voting age from 18 to 16 is an action that deserves careful consideration. I was surprised by the absence of any reference to this issue in the recent MORI poll on changes to the electoral system sponsored by the Privileges and Procedures Committee.

Whether or not many 16 year-olds today actually leave school to go out to work, and most do not, it is the case that compulsory schooling stops at 16. After that any person can go to work, and be eligible to pay tax. That is enough for me to be able to say that, in principle, they should have the franchise. There should be no taxation without representation.

However this principle must be tempered by a dose of reality. There is a feeling that the consequences of any decisions taken by the age of 16 do not become apparent until later, and that it is the realisation of these consequences and subsequent coping with them that starts the maturation of our young people. The year 11 student may indeed be a callow youth indeed, with little or no responsibility; but by 17 is starting to examine his or her options and decisions from a more mature perspective.

I believe that it is a sensible and practical step to reduce the voting age to 17, and to examine the effects before giving consideration to the possibility of a reduction to 16 at some time in the future.

Most of our 16 year-olds choose to remain in 6th form or at college, many of those will go on to university, where they will get their first taste of politics in the U.K. system. There is good evidence in the U.K. that those who get involved and vote as students remain voters for life. Whether that experience transfers back to our system is not clear, but we must try to encourage our young people to get involved in politics, and it is in 6th form or college at 17 that the flame can be nurtured. If we can catch them at 17, maybe we can get them again at 21 and hence for life.

The second measure to liberalise eligibility also connects to the “no taxation without representation” theme. In this case those who come to work and live on the Island will soon be required to register and receive some form of “unique identifier” or identity card under the population register in order to work, live and pay tax here. I believe that, along with those three permissions to work, be housed and to pay tax should come the right to vote.

The causes of low turnout and voter apathy, whether real or apparent, may be many, but certainly in the urban parishes, confusion over who is eligible to vote and where they are registered, and the inaccuracy of the register are major problems. We have a Migration Steering Group actively committed to producing an efficient, effective and accurate register of the population to be in place by 2008. We should be capitalising on this work to ensure that voter registration is part of the population register under the new migration policy. This would be joined-up government at its best.

Whether a politician or a voter is for or against the arrival of party politics in Jersey, there can surely be no argument that those who wish to start up parties in furthering their democratic aims must be allowed to do so. Such parties may succeed or fail, but that must be dependant on the will of the electorate and not of a decision by the Assembly to refuse them. In order to regulate any system for parties or candidates a simple registration scheme is required to ensure elections are well run. Such a scheme would include –

- the naming of parties (names should not be too similar to each other as to cause confusion, nor should they be defamatory);
- clear responsibilities for Secretary and Treasurer of the party over affiliation and accreditation matters.

My understanding is that the Privileges and Procedures Committee is already engaged in developing a system for setting limits to and regulation of election expenses. Given the experience of recent elections, I am sure that such a measure is appropriate. This proposition effectively serves to ensure that it is in place in time for the 2008

elections.

Finally, the Public Elections Law 2002 needs to be amended to permit party allegiance (and logo) to be printed on the ballot paper.

Although there may be some minor manpower and financial implications to this proposition I believe these can be absorbed within existing resources.