

STATES OF JERSEY

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RÔLE OF THE UNELECTED MEMBERS OF THE STATES: REVIEW (P.5/2009) – AMENDMENT

Lodged au Greffe on 27th January 2009
by Deputy T.M. Pitman of St. Helier

STATES GREFFE

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In paragraph (b)(ii), after the words “subsequent report and recommendations” insert the words “which publication date shall be no later than one year after the appointment of the Chairman and members of the Panel”.

DEPUTY T.M. PITMAN OF ST. HELIER

REPORT

“Delay always breeds danger, and to protract a great design is often to ruin it.”

Miguel de Cervantes (1547 – 1616)

If there is one topic which most members of the public would agree upon as viewing government almost completely incapable of delivering, I would suggest that it is surely the issue of political reform. Indeed, politicians come and politicians go, yet coherent governmental reform – as opposed to the disastrous ‘cherry-picking’ witnessed with the Clothier Report of nearly a decade ago – progresses at the pace of a snail.

Anecdotal evidence, gathered in canvassing through both Senatorial and Deputies’ elections during the autumn of 2008, suggest the inability to modernise and enhance governmental transparency as being second only to the charge of ‘not listening’ in causing and maintaining voter apathy. It is a claim that I, as a recently elected States Member, would be forced to concede I cannot dispute as being valid.

While it is not the intention here to offer analysis of the report supporting the Deputy of St. Martin’s proposition, I would simply echo that no-one but a fool advocates rapid change simply for the sake of change itself. This is undoubtedly never truer than in the sphere of government and democracy. Yet as the quote from Clothier contained within the Deputy’s report highlights so eloquently, those within this Assembly who would – for whatever reason – vote for a continued resistance to accepting or even exploring change, no matter what the weight of supporting evidence risk inflicting even more damage. To quote Anthony J. DAngelo:

“Just because something is tradition doesn’t make it right.”

So, why do I propose that we set a deadline of one year for the completion and publication of the independent review into the roles of the unelected members of the States?

1. Because while I personally believe it may possibly have been better to undertake analysis of the two multi-faceted and thus democratically conflicted, roles of Bailiff and Attorney General separately, a full year is nevertheless a wholly reasonable timescale to accomplish the task. Certainly if such a review is entered into with an open mind.
2. Because such a deadline will ensure the review and, most importantly, its recommendations and consequences, will not be allowed to drift from one Assembly to the next and as a result wither like so much else. Indeed, committing to such a deadline would then allow a full 18 months for members of the current Assembly to debate and, if it sees fit, bring proposals to the House to be voted upon.

“Men cling passionately to old traditions and display intense reluctance to modifying customary modes of behaviour, as innovators at all times have found to their cost. The dead-weight of conservatism, largely a lazy and cowardly distaste for the strenuous and painful activity of real thinking, has undoubtedly retarded human progress.”

V. Gordon Childe (1892 – 1957)

This is a new Assembly – I would urge all members, whatever their political persuasion, to support this amendment and ensure we finally embrace the 21st century: consigning the politics of procrastination as a tool of blocking reform/maintaining the status quo to the dustbin of history.

Financial and manpower statement

The Deputy of St. Martin has referred to the possible cost of the review in his report and I do not believe that there would be any additional resource implications if the timescale proposed in this amendment was followed.