

2024.12.10

Deputy M.B. Andrews of St Helier North of the Chief Minister regarding the Government's main achievements since he took office (OQ.235/2024):

Will the Chief Minister detail the Government's main achievements since he took office?"

Deputy L.J. Farnham of St. Mary, St. Ouen and St. Peter (The Chief Minister):

How long have we got?

The Bailiff:

One minute, 30 seconds.

Deputy L.J. Farnham:

I will do my best. The role of any Government is to deliver good governance, and I believe one of our achievements is working cohesively as a Government. Since its inception, the Government has worked together well and continues to work together well. We make decisions based on consensus following robust discussions and debate. We operate in an environment where it is okay to disagree, and in fact it is important to disagree because that delivers better debates. Decisions are made democratically without fear or favour in an environment where all Ministers and Assistant Ministers work together to ...

Deputy M.B. Andrews:

Sir, I must say this is not answering the question.

Deputy L.J. Farnham:

... to deliver the best outcomes for Islanders.

The Bailiff:

I am asked for a ruling. An answer which is protean in its form can be answered in a way which is equally protean, I am afraid. The reality of it is, is that you have asked for a very general statement and an achievement can be an achievement in internal processing as well as an achievement in external results. I am afraid a general question is inevitably going to give rise to a general answer, Deputy. Please carry on, Chief Minister.

Deputy L.J. Farnham:

I make the point about the way the Government is working well together because that is a vital component of achieving anything. Because if you have a Government that does not work well together, that delays a decision. To be more specific, we have delivered a Common Strategic Policy, which was published early in April and supported by the Assembly. In early August, we lodged the Budget after a lot of preparation, and that was approved by the Assembly. That facilitated a lot of action in relation to the Corporate Strategic Policy. The move to a living wage, the journey to a high-wage economy has started. Overdale has been demolished, planning application of the new hospital received. Teachers' pay award was agreed. Improvements to the planning service are underway. MONEYVAL assessment recognised and acted upon. We have launched the Island's First Sustainable Finance Action Plan, implementing all the recommendations of violence against women and girls. There are 23 items on the list I have here, but I will not say them all. But it was just to demonstrate that we are making good progress.

3.2.1 Deputy M.B. Andrews:

One of the things that the Minister has predicated is the importance of curbing growth in the public sector, and I would like to know what actions he has taken to curb growth and to ensure that any future Budget will potentially see reductions in overall public sector spend?

Deputy L.J. Farnham:

The actions we have taken as a Government is to put in place a policy in relation to the size of the public sector and charge the chief executive and senior management team with delivering that. That work is underway. We are in at the start of the early stages of reorganisation of the senior management levels across the public sector. We have also put a temporary break on the engagement of consultants, unless it is essential.

3.2.2 Deputy M. Tadier of St. Brelade:

Does the Chief Minister agree that one thing his Government could rightly be criticised of, and I have heard it from constituents, is that they do not often publicise the good news and the successes of Government? Would the Minister explain where he believes that the line lies in terms of Government between blowing its own trumpet and being accused of putting out positive spin and propaganda versus not necessarily engaging with the public sector?

The Bailiff:

I am afraid, Deputy, it is not apparent to me that that fits within the parameters of the Government's main achievements since he took office.

Deputy M. Tadier:

I think it is, because I think, as you said, a protean question can attract protean supplementation. [Laughter]

The Bailiff:

No, I am not sure they can.

Deputy M. Tadier:

I will look up that word in a moment.

The Bailiff:

If it helps, I am looking it up now to make sure I have used it correctly. Any other question?

Deputy M. Tadier:

I think it is a genuine question. It relates to processes, and does he think it is important that Governments actually, in order to keep the public on board with what they are doing, also publicise that, and that needs to be considered as one of the list.

Deputy L.J. Farnham:

I am happy to answer that. I think we have always agreed collectively that actions speak louder than words. We do announce most of the key decisions, as I am aware, through the channels of the media. We are perhaps not very good at blowing our own trumpet, we would rather get things done and see the impacts on Islanders' lives, but the point is taken. We will try and improve our communication.

3.2.3 Deputy P.F.C. Ozouf of St. Saviour:

I wonder whether the Chief Minister, following his supplementary answer that he has got a cohesive Government, does he think one of the achievements has been an achievement to have a Government but have a States Assembly that sometimes ... and I do not want to be negative, but sometimes feels excluded. The Government gets its way, as was clear in the Budget in the majority of cases.

Deputy L.J. Farnham:

I do not generally agree with the statement of the Deputy. This Government seeks to work and make decisions as a Government and bring important propositions to the Assembly for debate. I think we have good debates, and I am pleased to say that the Government has managed to win the majority of the propositions because we have had good debates about it. As I say, when things get tough we should not raise our voices, we should raise our arguments.

3.2.4 Deputy P.F.C. Ozouf:

The question is whether or not the Government is succeeding with, effectively, a majority? Does the Chief Minister have any concerns about the fact that the Government achieves its will, which obviously Governments do, and they want to do that, and that is fair, but are they doing it by compromising on the rights of Members because there is a block majority of these coalition partners, if you like? And I say that in a positive way.

The Bailiff:

I appreciate that and I think that might be a question you could reserve for the Chief Minister when he answers questions without notice, if that is what you wish.

Deputy P.F.C. Ozouf:

Very good, Sir.

The Bailiff:

But I do not think it fits within these definitions.

[10:00]

For everyone's ... not everyone's but Deputy Tadier's and mine assistance, protean: "Tending to and able to change frequently or easily, 'It is difficult to comprehend the whole of this protean subject'. Alternatively, able to do many things, versatile. Protean thinkers who scan the horizons of work and society." If that assists. **[Approbation]** I am not sure that my iPhone deserves the applause. **[Laughter]**