**FF Plus: Dr WJ Boshoff**

**Debate on Vote 35: Science and Innovation**

**23 May 2023**

Honourable House Chair

The department of science and innovation has wide ranging functions. From the National Research Foundation, which is nearly a department on its own, to the Technology Innovation Agency which provides finance for innovative tech-based enterprises, to the Human and Social Sciences Research Council which makes sense of human responses to a fast-changing world, this department has an essential task. It gazes into space, send rockets into space, and facilitate radio signals out of space – literally messages from the very distant past.

Generally, when one considers the activities of this department, it creates enthusiasm. The committee is also young and vibrant.

In Vhembe we saw the difference science and innovation can make. We saw how a college empowers its students and alumni, not only to acquire the knowledge and skills to participate in the global economy but enables them to do it right there from outside Thohoyandou.

This department is an economic generator. The nature of technology is sometimes to equalise the playing field. These days it is not important anymore whether a village in Limpopo is connected to either the power or the telephone grid, because off-grid electricity is a reality and cellular communication has made telephone lines obsolete. But this generating department’s budget is gradually cut. It must do more with less. Does government take the department seriously? It seems not.

Technology is dead, without the human faculty of innovation it is worthless.

In hierdie veld is die grootste bate kundige mense. Kennis, kommunikasie, finansiering en toerusting kan beskikbaar wees, maar dit kry eers betekenis as daar mense is wat dit hulle eie maak, wat dit toepas, wat die dryfkrag het om iets daarmee te maak.

Waarmee ’n land, ’n besigheid of enige stelsel ook al besig is, jy pas jou grootste bate op. Kom ons aanvaar vir die argument die mees ongunstige verduideliking vir hoekom wetenskap- en innovasie “White space” was. Daardie wit mans wat in 1994 vir die staat gewerk het, was die staat se bate – sedert 27 April onder beheer van die ANC.

Die regering kon vir hulle gesê het: “Julle is hier, julle is hier omdat julle onregverdige voordele ontvang het. Nou gaan julle hier bly tot elkeen van julle twee of drie jong swart mense opgelei het wat julle poste kan oorneem.”

Maar dit is nie wat gebeur het nie. Kwotas en transformasieteikens het kundigheid laat uitvloei soos water. Eintlik nie soos water nie, want water is waardevol. Watter entiteit ons ook al ontmoet, is daar vakante poste en vinnige omset van personeel beperk hulle prestasie.

Then we have the SKA which is highly impressive. But still, the newly established national park is not fenced, at least eighteen months after we heard costing was done and only execution remains.

We were told that locals would get access to the superfast internet connection. My information is that it has been denied them.

Valuations done to put a price on servitudes which need to be acquired did not consider the socio-economic impact on farm dwellers, whether employers or employees. Honourable Deputy-minister Manamela says it did not need to do so, but I have a document which says it did.

Honourable minister, we visited the infrastructure and were impressed. Now I invite you to accompany me when I visit farms in the area. Don’t let liaison officials tell you what they think you need to hear.

We like the department and its work. But sometimes we don’t like its style.

I thank you.