

Budget Debate on Vote 10: Public Enterprises

Speech by Ghaleb Cachalia MP

DA Shadow Minister of Public Enterprises

We are here to confront an issue that has been plaguing our nation for far too long—the incompetence and negligence of the Department of Public Enterprises (DPE).

This department, which was supposed to be the custodian of our state-owned companies, has instead become an accomplice in their downfall.

It is with a heavy heart and a fire in my words that I speak of the acts of commission and omission that have led to the destruction of the capabilities of these once-thriving entities.

From Eskom, through Transnet, Denel, SAA, Alexkor and SAXpress we see no green shoots as the minister is fond of saying.

And still that phrase has wormed its way into the lexicon of the department and its fellow travellers in committee.

The DPE, entrusted with the responsibility to nurture and guide our state-owned companies, and advise and monitor targets, has instead forsaken its duty and contributed to their demise.

Through their gross mismanagement and lack of foresight, the DPE has turned these institutions into mere shells of their former selves, more it has facilitated corruption.

Companies that were once the pride of our nation, providing essential services and driving economic growth, now lie in ruins, bleeding taxpayers' money while failing to deliver on their mandates.

The net effect on the fiscus, on our economy and on the lives of honest South Africans trying to eke out a living, minister to, and educate the old and the young does not need detailing with statistics.

You know it; I know it and the world knows it because, of late, a day doesn't pass without globally respected media reporting on this rank failure.

What has the department done to address the deep-rooted issues facing these state-owned enterprises?

Nothing but empty promises and half-hearted attempts at reform. It has facilitated corruption to continue, by creating an environment where funds meant for development and progress are siphoned off.

A culture perpetuating impunity and a disregard for accountability remain the sad output.

This inaction and lack of vision have resulted in the deterioration of crucial infrastructure – electricity, rail, ports, airlines and more.

All of this while we citizens and businesses sit in darkness, while we are unable to meet the export needs of the economy at our ports, and while we wait in vain to see if the albatross that is SAA will fly with its 6 aircraft waiting for manna to fall from heaven in the guise of the Takatso consortium.

That elusive entity which key member, Gidon Novick, has now left, citing issues of inadequate communication and an inability to raise funds.

The department's acts of commission in focusing on inconsequential and impeding elements that stand in the way of progress, and acts of omission which speak to their failure to take decisive action to rectify the dire situation, is plain.

They are complicit – wittingly and unwittingly.

What we demand is a complete overhaul of the system to ensure transparency, integrity, and meritocracy.

We demand competent and visionary leadership that will restore these companies to their former glory and privatise as appropriate.

What we don't need is the constant shooting down of whistleblowers when we should be taking action to support them.

Witness the inexcusable silence from the committee and the department as the chair of Eskom, Mpho Makwana declares publicly that he will throw the book at former CEO André de Ruyter for various offences he might have committed arising from his public statements.

And as if that isn't shamefully enough, Makwana's mentor and protector-in-chief, minister Gordhan says he will encourage the board to take action against De Ruyter's violation of the confidentiality clause in his employment contract.

Surely things should be the other way around when the entire nation is looking for answers.

Surely this is the time to back the brave instead of hiding behind false formalities.

Alas, Makwana and minister Gordhan and the department are on the wrong side of the equation.

Know this: for a minister to hold back on key information and not divulge information that would expose criminal activities and the complicity of other ministers in government is in itself a crime, possibly even treason.

But let's focus on the deeply troubling practice that has infected the budgets of this department for far too long—the insidious box-ticking exercises that serve as a mere facade of progress while achieving very little in reality.

For years, we have witnessed the sorry state of affairs within this department.

Budgets are presented with great fanfare, promising transformative change and progress for our nation.

Yet, time and time again, we are left disappointed and disillusioned as these allocations become nothing more than token gestures, mere checkboxes on a bureaucratic checklist. All this, while Rome burns.

The department, which should be the driving force behind our state-owned companies, has instead become a symbol of stagnation and inefficiency. Its budgetary allocations, carefully crafted to give the appearance of action, have yielded little substantive change.

It would be remiss to overlook the role played by the minister who once showed promise in fixing our revenue services but has since prioritized party interests above the welfare of the public.

The once-respected individual who fought for the interests of the public has succumbed to the lure of political expediency, heading a department in disarray.

The people of South Africa deserve a government that is committed to genuine progress and meaningful change.

We demand accountability from the Department of Public Enterprises and its minister.

No longer should our budgets be reduced to mere box-ticking exercises, serving as smoke and mirrors to distract us from the lack of substantive action. We must demand a thorough review

of the budgetary allocations and ensure that they align with the real needs of our nation. Let us hold the department accountable for every cent spent and demand tangible results that benefit the people.

To the Minister of Public Enterprises, I implore you to remember your initial commitment to public service. Put the interests of the people above party loyalty.

Rise above the temptation of political expediency and prioritize the welfare of our nation. Show true leadership and steer the department towards a path of genuine reform and progress.

The time for complacency is over.

We, in the DA, will raise our voices and demand change and condemn the box-ticking exercises that have plagued this department for far too long. Join us as we build a future where budgets are not mere illusions, but tangible instruments of progress and prosperity.