

MINI PLENARIES (BUDGET VOTES)

Vote 31: Employment and Labour

Hon. Xolani Ngwezi, MP

21 July 2020

Honourable Chairperson,

Employment and labour in South Africa have been dealt crippling blows by Covid-19 over the last 120 days. With a 7% contraction of the economy forecast by the South African Reserve Bank to be prevailing by the end of this year, and a conservative estimate of the loss of 1.7 million jobs, it remains critical to the livelihoods and welfare of millions of South Africans that this Department deliver during this period, at 100% of its mandate.

This will necessitate a completely functional Department, which must be able to assist the South African workforce to the fullest extent, whilst maintaining the safety of departmental staff. In this respect, the Department must ensure that all PPE requirements are met, as the downward revision of departmental performance targets will not assist in alleviating the burden that is being enforced upon the South African labour force as a result of Covid-19.

South Africa must keep working and a balance must be found between keeping the economy going and keeping labour safe. Regulations must be in place to ensure worker safety, but the workplace should not be over-regulated in order to achieve this objective. Over-precautionary regulatory labour and employment environments will only place additional resource drain on already struggling businesses.

More must be done by this Department with targeted interventions, which will assist that portion of our labour force that finds itself currently retrenched, unable to work, or working but with income reductions.

Corruption has flourished during this time, with many more avenues for criminal activity being exploited due to Covid-19 labour relief measures. Shamefully, we have witnessed large-scale theft of UIF monies by unscrupulous employers, some of which it is alleged to have been done in collusion with departmental staff.

Criminal activity will only further expand the pressure currently upon government to provide for those in need of employment relief measures. It must accordingly be investigated and stringently prosecuted by the state.

The CCMA finds itself under immense pressure at this time and must be further capacitated in order to meet the immense workload that is currently before the Commissioners.

In conclusion, it is non-negotiable for the workforce of South Africa that this Department meets its performance targets. Our workforce must be safe through

preventative measures in effect at our places of work, but the regulatory environment should not be too onerous on employers in this respect.

A balance must be found, with responsibility for safety and wellbeing also being reasonably shared between employers and employees. Wear a mask, social distance, sanitise and stay safe.

What remains of critical importance is that South Africa keeps its workforce safely working.

I thank you.

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