

BUDGET VOTES

Vote 5: Home Affairs

Hon. LL Van der Merwe, MP

22 July 2020

House Chairperson –

May I start by remembering former Member of Parliament, Dr Andrew Mlangeni. May his soul rest in peace. On behalf of the IFP, I wish to express our condolences to his family, his friends and the African National Congress at large.

Chairperson, the Department of Home Affairs is one of those that has had its budget adjusted **downwards**.

This was a sacrifice the Department was asked to make, as part of our collective effort in the fight against Covid-19. That being said, the IFP believes that this Department can hardly afford such a significant deviation at this time.

We must therefore consider **what** we are sacrificing.

Local government elections are mere months away and the Department's role in guaranteeing free and fair elections **cannot** be overstated. While the IEC continues to give assurances that they are ready to host the 2021 polls, a number of key questions remain unanswered: such as - will there be enough budget and enough time to roll out the much-anticipated new voting machines?

How free and fair will elections be in the time of Covid-19, where personal interaction with voters will be replaced with more online interaction, given that the IEC has already flagged social media and fake news as having the ability to compromise the integrity of our elections.

Even before the advent of Covid-19, this Department had a number of notable challenges.

The Department has become synonymous with systems that are perpetually offline, long queues and unhelpful staff. Thus, the Department's ICT reform, its ongoing "war on queues" and getting the Department's services fully online are urgent targets **that must be achieved**. A budget increase, and not a budget cut, was therefore needed to address these challenges.

Chairperson, in April of this year, the Department of Public Works erected a R37 million **national embarrassment**, between South Africa and Zimbabwe, also erroneously known as a border fence. However, as we now know, this national embarrassment stopped absolutely nobody from crossing into our country illegally.

It remains a cause for great concern that the influx of undocumented migrants continues to rise, yet the Department of Home Affairs **has no effective system to**

deal with this. In addition, the Immigration Services Inspectorate remains understaffed, further crippling an already broken system.

This Department will argue that the *Border Management Authority Bill*, which came into effect yesterday, will be the panacea to our challenges. However, it doesn't solve the fact that we already have a high influx of undocumented and illegal migrants in towns and cities across our country. And the question we must ask today is: what is this Department ***going to do about it?***

This Department cannot continue to pass the buck to others, such as the Department of Labour or Local Government, in this regard. It is a fact, **that the failure by the Department of Home Affairs** to address the saturation of undocumented migrants is a contributing factor to our ***incredibly high*** unemployment rate. This is exactly what the recent truck driver protests were about.

Government has itself admitted that their immigration system is broken. The Minister of Labour has admitted that many sectors are employing undocumented migrants only. The Minister of Finance made similar remarks recently.

South Africa has no refugee reception centres at our borders, which sees many people enter our country, and then simply disappear off the radar. Many who are in possession of temporary asylum-seeker permits are able to live, work, run their businesses and use government services for many years on end, without their status as refugees ever being confirmed or denied.

Yet, this Department's general response to these issues does not meet its constitutional obligations and suggests a **complete absence** of political will in this regard.

This budget cut will no doubt hamper the work of this Department in the year ahead.

However, despite the budget cut, the IFP believes that it is time for this Department to own up to its shortcomings, **and focus on solving these issues**. We will therefore support Vote 5.

Contact:

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