



SPEECH

DEBATE ON THE COVID-19 ADJUSTMENT OF THE APPROPRIATION BILL

25 August 2020

Madame Speaker and Presiding Officers

Honourable Premier

Members of the Executive Council

Honourable Members of the Provincial Legislature

The People of Gauteng

Before I begin, yesterday marked one year since the brutal murder and rape of UCT student, Uyinene Mrwetyana when she went to the post office to pick up a parcel. We can never be allowed to forget that there is a systemic massacre of womxn in this country. Every single day we hear of many more cases. And until we are safe as womxn, I will continuously remind the members of this house that we live in constant fear for our lives.

Madame Speaker,

Across the world, local, regional and national governments have galvanised against a common enemy. An enemy that cares not about our ideologies or petty differences, an enemy that poses the greatest threat to the survival of billions of people across the world. People who are both economically vulnerable and have been historically marginalised. Fundamentally, Madame Speaker, COVID-19 is not just a global health crisis but a crisis of inequality and access. It therefore goes without saying that our response to this crisis should be led by

progressive interventions that seek to not only respond to the most immediate needs of this crisis but also deal with the underlying vulnerabilities that have exacerbated the impacts on our people.

Madame Speaker, the adjusted budget being tabled is indeed a progressive and people-centred budget amid a difficult economic situation. It seeks to give impetus to the provincial covid-19 response plan while also ensuring that the GGT 2030 mandate is safeguarded along with continued service delivery.

This is a budget that manages to increase spending where interventions are needed most. 84% of the total budget is allocated to health, education, social and economic development collectively. The true test of progressive interventions is if they impact the lives of the most vulnerable in our society. The deliberate focus on children; on the poor and unemployed; and on our health-care system speaks to a multi-pronged approach that ensures we respond to this most immediate health crisis while also ensuring our future remains in-tact. This budget also covers social relief programs focusing on alleviating food insecurity and bringing about various basic income grants.

According to UNESCO, at the peak of the national lockdowns, 830 million children were out of the classroom globally. There is growing concern that given the economic strain put on millions of families across the world, that many of those children will not return to school. Their absence from school significantly harms their chances of escaping poverty but on a larger scale harms the ability of whole societies to grow and move forward. This is what motivates our focus for allocating a large portion of the budget to supporting our public schooling system and ensuring we do not lose any young person or teacher along the way. Indeed, they are fundamental to rebuilding our society post Covid.

Let us talk facts about interventions that focus on the most vulnerable in our province:

- An additional R250 million that will be provided to support SMMEs during this difficult time. And will be used as seed funding to raise R1.1 billion for this cause,
- Funding the salaries of Covid 19 youth brigades to screen learners, and provide support to school facilities, addressing the youth unemployment crisis,
- Support for athletes and staff in sport, as well as for those in the creative industry while these sectors remain closed,
- Trucking water to refill water tanks at schools and provide the necessary sanitation materials and equipment,
- Supporting catch-up activities for learners in Maths, Science and Technology,
- The provision of meals to learners and the greater community, even if they were not required to be physically at school,
- Ensuring there are more beds and equipment in our health facilities,
- Sanitizing busses and public transport facilities, including providing PPE for public transport workers in our province,
- Establishing hand-washing facilities and implementing physical distancing measures in public places,
- Providing R 20 million for ward committees to conduct ward-based civic education on Covid 19.

Madam Speaker, what makes the feat of this budget incredibly impressive is that in the midst of economic constraints brought about by an economic downturn, we as the ANC-led government of Gauteng have, at great sacrifice, reallocated

money from multiple departments across the provincial government to support our response to COVID-19. In the process Madame Speaker, we are ensuring that no-one is left behind and that the future remains bright.

Madame Speaker, we will continue to use our budget to encourage job creation through programmes such as the Extended Public Works Programme (EPWP), Tshepo 1 million, the delivery of infrastructure as well as the Township Economic Revitalisation Programme amongst others. There is a great need in society currently, and therefore we will use all programmes at our disposal to ensure that the people of this province are protected by progressive interventions in this uncertain time.

Madame Speaker, we as the African National Congress are aware of the real danger that COVID-19 has in reversing our democracy's gains. It is for this reason that we put forward a budget that will protect our gains in education, health and in terms of social and economic protection.

Corruption

Madame Speaker, we as the ANC must address the elephant in the room: the cancer that is corruption. Members of the opposition have used this to attack and discredit us. Madame Speaker let it be clear that we unequivocally condemn corruption and support the President in our collective efforts to bring those responsible to book. Allow me to quote President Ramaphosa who this weekend reiterated: "This is an unforgiveable betrayal for the millions of South Africans who are being negatively affected by the impact of Covid-19, experiencing hunger daily, hopelessness and joblessness." Corruption is a disease that eats away at the very fibre of our society and like the cancer it is, it must be isolated and tackled head on. We cannot turn a blind eye.

This is why we must commend and acknowledge the interventions made by the Premier and his team by actively requesting the SIU to investigate, the moment something was afoul. Before these matters even got to the media, before it was used as a politicking tool. We are hearing the cries of our people for good governance and the eradication of corruption. Those cries are not falling on deaf ears.

Before I got here, I was a student leader and activist who believed in courageously talking truth to power. We learnt that we cannot be silent when we see injustice and that is what forced us to take to the streets in the largest mass mobilization of young people post-apartheid – what we know as “Fees Must Fall.” It is what brought me here to be a public representative because I fundamentally believe that “this” is how we are going to positively change the lives of our people. I will be dishonouring not just myself but the millions of young people that I represent if I do not say something.

We as public representatives, across all political parties, play an incredibly important role in holding the executive accountable. It must be us at the forefront of this fight against corruption, Madame Speaker. We cannot outsource this role to NGOs, the media and community activists alone. It must be US! Our people have entrusted us to be their eyes and their ears, and that is perhaps our most important responsibility of all. Let me not mislead you, it is going to be a long and uphill battle to clean up and regain the trust of our people. But we have no other choice. Indeed, we see true leadership and strength of character during times of crises. Let us rise to this occasion. Let us be worthy of leading our people to a better life.

In Closing

Madame Speaker, in closing all is not lost. This tiny microscopic virus, invisible to the naked eye may have brought entire economies to its knees, killed hundreds of thousands of people (and counting) across the globe, and has forced us to deeply reflect about who and what is important to us as a society. But it has also brought about the best of human thought, innovation and most importantly humanity and kindness to the fore.

(As evidenced with the non-invasive ventilators that were donated yesterday to the Charlotte Maxeke Hospital. These machines present an alternative to the mechanical ventilator, which studies have shown to present problems down the line for patients in recovery. These non-invasive ventilators are also being manufactured locally within South Africa (which means job creation), and they are manufactured at a fraction of the cost. This is merely one example of what can happen when all role players come together to find efficient and cost-effective solutions for the benefit of our people.)

There can be no argument that refutes the good intention and thoughtfulness of this budget. It is truly a budget for the people, it reflects the values and aspirations of the African National Congress to deliver a government that cares most about the vulnerable in our society.

While constructive critique is always welcome (we are a democracy after all), those who stand against this budget for the sake of political mileage must ask themselves if their efforts are truly in service of the people of this province. Upon introspection, they will find that the ANC has once again put people at the centre of governance and service delivery.

Let us continue in our mission, to bring about a transformative change in the material conditions of our people. As the ANC, we support this budget.

I thank you.

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Delivered by Honourable Fasiha Hassan on behalf of the ANC on 25 August 2020 in the COVID-19 Adjusted Budget debate

(NB: text in blue reflects additional content)