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PROCEEDINGS OF HYBRID MINIPLINARY

Members of the mini-plenary session met at Good Hope Chamber at 14:00.

House Chairperson Mr W Horn took the Chair and requested members to observe a moment of silence for prayer or meditation.

APPROPRIATION BILL

Debate Vote No 41 - Water and Sanitation:

The MINISTER OF WATER AND SANITATION: House Chair, hon Cabinet colleagues, Deputy Minister, DM, Mahlobo on virtual platform and DM Seitlholo, the Chair of the Portfolio Committee, the hon members of this Portfolio Committee, all members of the National Assembly, Director-General and all senior managers present here, the leadership of all our entities who are on

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livestream, leadership of various stakeholders in the civil society, fellow South Africans ...

IsiXhosa:

... molweni ...

Xitsonga:

... inhlikani ...

English:

... good afternoon. This year marks the 30th celebration of our Constitution, which provides the right to all South Africans to access clean water and dignified sanitation services. Water has no substitute. Our budget allocation has since declined from R23,4 billion in 2025-26 financial year, to R22 billion for 2026-2027. I request that this House adopt this budget without complicating it.

As pointed out by the President during Sona that South Africa has made significant strides when it comes to water services, especially the basic water service and sanitation, as well as securing sufficient national raw water supply. With more than 15 unblocked projects, which are multi-million-year projects.

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We are on course, including the Lesotho Highlands. That shows commitment of this government to have more water, that is a raw for bulk water supply.

Raw water supply is currently in the balance with existing demands on a national scale, but there are localised deficit which are systematic.

Hon members, however, as noted by the President, the reliability of municipal water services has declined sharply with worsening water services disruptions, sewer spillages, and poor water quality in many areas. In other words, while most people now have access to a tap, water often does not come out of the tap or is not safe to drink. This remain undeniable truth which we are attending to.

In the spirit of cooperative governance, the President met all mayors in South Africa on the 30th of April to discuss the National Water Action Plan and to commit all the mayors that when intervention is supposed to be made in their municipalities, they must open up. Let's work together because our people need water. Our people don't recognise the fact that there are three spheres of governance. When they need

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water, they need water. And the reality is, it is municipalities are going through difficult time in terms of provision of water.

But more importantly, the reforms in the water sector are very much important to improve the financial sustainability and to ensure that there are effective management of water through a staff that is having capacity, insource water tankering for emergency purposes.

Hon members, the gist and fundamental challenges to be tackled on as identified centres around ring fencing of revenue from the saves of water as a key requirement to support operation, maintenance, and a key requirement to support upgrading and long-term sustainability. But closing of those leaks becomes very much urgent. That is why it was part of our non-negotiables.

The President also indicated that the action plan includes a focus on addressing crime, corruption, sabotage in water sector, which is led by water mafias and other dangerous hard-core criminals.

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On the 10th of April, we met at a national level with all water sector stakeholders, where we're making assessment of our Water and Sanitation Indaba, to check how far our water services authorities in implementing the non-negotiables.

A lot of progress has been made at a national government level. However, very insufficient progress has been made at water service authorities. But with that said, there are exceptions when it comes to Ekurhuleni, Cape Town Metro, Steve Tshwete, Thembisile Hani Local Municipality, Bushbuckridge.

For instance, in Bushbuckridge, a good story to tell. This municipality, which is very small, it has separated water service provision from water service authorities. And other big municipalities can learn out of this. So, there are municipalities that are implementing the non-negotiables.

Accelerated support on intervention in poorly performing municipalities. As indicated in the last two annual reports, the Department of Water and Sanitation, DWS, has fully spent its infrastructure grant for municipalities. In the current

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financial year, DWS has been allocated R12,3 billion for ...
[Inaudible.] ... as well as infrastructure grant.

Of this regional bulk infrastructure grant will fund 70 bulk infrastructure projects across all nine provinces, while the water services infrastructure grant will support 341 projects. These projects are at various stages of implementation with 175 of them planned for completion during this financial year.

Grants will also be used to leverage additional investment by unlocking partnership with the private sector and development institutions. The DWS further make increasing use of water boards. Our water boards have capacity. Our water boards have the technical know-how to assist municipalities. Already, most of the municipalities have entered into partnership with those water boards but also contracted some water boards to be their implementing agents. And that we appreciate because those are the state-owned enterprises.

The blue, the green, and no drop report assessment; we have issued that report on the 31st of March 2026, and the situation does not look good. The wastewater system is in a

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critical state performance from 39% to 47%. It's really worrisome because that go to an extent of polluting our water.

Debts owed to municipalities, are increasing on a daily basis. We're standing at 27 billion as against 25 billion that we reported last time. However, the water boards have implemented credit control measures such as throttling of water supply to non-paying municipalities as a last resort, attaching municipal bank accounts. The other option that we have is to close or shut down water, but unfortunately, we can't. because water is the basic and fundamental right. However, if the water boards are not paid, the quality of water is going to be compromised.

In addition, the National Treasury has implemented withholding of equitable share to the municipalities that have already gone through this are 62.

The DWS granted funded projects. Just to mention few, as an account to the nation, that R15-million Misgund Bulk Water Scheme in Eastern Cape has been completed in March 2026, R9 millions of Sterkpruit Lebona Ke Batho Water Waste Treatment Plant has been refurbished and completed in March

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2026, producing 12 million megalitres as against six megalitres. But still, people don't have enough water.

In Gauteng, the R759 million Klipdrift Water Treatment Plant on the 8th of May during the Constitution Day, we went there - 50 megalitres, we are ready to transfer that water to Tshwane Municipality. But in terms of their storage capacity, they are not yet ready to accept that water. So, it means our problems are systematic and they are at a water service provision level.

In Limpopo, 24 out of 55 villages have been reticulated with R4,8 billion ...

Mr D M SKOSANA: I've raised my hand for a very long time now.

The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Mr W Horn): Hon Minister, please just hold on for a moment. Hon Skosana on the virtual platform, why do you want to be recognized?

Mr D M SKOSANA: Should I not be recognized, House Chair? Are you saying why I'm supposed to be recognised?

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The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Mr W Horn): No, I'm asking why do you want to intervene?

Mr D M SKOSANA: I just wanted to say the Minister just said that in the Thembisile Municipality and Dr J S Moroka, as we speak here, we don't have water. I'm here. I'm home here. Thank you.

The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Mr W Horn): Thank you, hon Skosana, but you have members who's going to participate in this debate. And this is a point of debate. So please let them know and then they can really whip the Minister when they have the opportunity. But that's not a point of order or a point of privilege.

Mr D M SKOSANA: Thank you, House Chair.

The MINISTER OF WATER AND SANITATION: that we are providing bulk does not mean we are reticulating. I think the honourable must also know the difference between distribution and provision of bulk. We are not taking the water to the tap. That's not our responsibility.

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Seven hundred and thirty-six million Babanana Bulk Water Pipeline Project has been completed in March 2026. The Mametja-Sekororo Regional Bulk Water Scheme of R352 million has been completed. Kwazulu-Natal Phase 3 of R1,5 billion Maphumulo Bulk Water has been completed. Mpumalanga Piet Retief Water Treatment Plant has been completed with R52 million, R234 million at Easterhoek at Ekulindeni Bulk has been completed. North West Moretele South Bulk has been completed with R351 million.

Water supply projects planned for completion are many, but we are going to provide that information to Parliament. In KZN, in Eastern Cape in Mpumalanga, Loskop Regional Bulk will be completed by December, Gabosch Dam, Driekoppies etc. There are so many, each and every province we have our own footprints on the projects that are completed. But what is still lacking is that reticulation and distribution. Hence, the community across the country cry of water that does not flow from their tap. That is why I started by acknowledging that.

The sanitation project planned for completion; the eradication of bucket system in the Free State is steady at 80% completion. Underperforming contract tasks have been

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terminated. [Inaudible.] ... have also been targeted for completion by June 2027.

Rural access program; we acknowledge the fact that there are communities that are unserved. They don't even have a single water infrastructure that is there. So we are going to focus on them to ensure that we package for those 2,600,000 settlements that don't have water at all through the drilling of boreholes, the protection of the springs, the harvest of rainfall, as well as adopt a village approach where we want to request the private sector to come in and work with us in terms of adopting a village because this village are there to stay and what they need is to be to be served accordingly as South Africans.

Addressing somewhat has challenges in the metros; we are assisting in the metros, especially in Tshwane, in the City of Johannesburg, in Nelson Mandela, through the metro trading services, as well as Mangaung Metro.

Building a capacity to deliver; we have established a water anti-corruption forum with Special Investigating Unit, SIU, and we see a lot of progress in terms of arrests as well as

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recouping of our funds that were taken during these fraudulent activities. So, that anti-corruption forum will also assist communities to report acts of crime.

We're also building skills and capacity in the sector, we are standing now at 15,8 posts that we have already funded, 116 engineers and other technical positions were filled, 54 candidate engineers are also appointed in the department. We are also part of the building global relations. South Africa has been nominated to be the Chair with France in terms of the United Nations Water Conference in December because we have proven ourselves beyond reasonable doubt when we hosted the Africa Investment Conference where we managed to mobilize 10 to 12 billion a year and that was appreciated.

In conclusion, the budget vote is more, it's more than a statement of intent. It is a statement of hope and possibility. It reflects our commitment to building a water sector of South Africa in which every person must have access to clean water and dignified sanitation. At the same time, it is a clear ... thank you very much. I request that you adopt to this. [Time expired.]

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Mr S L DITHEBE: Hon house chair, hon members of this august House, the Minister and Deputy Ministers of Water and Sanitation, the director-general and all senior executives, heads of Department of Water and Sanitation entities, chief executives and their respective teams, fellow South Africans, I dedicate this speech to my friend and comrade who died of brain haemorrhage at the tender age of 17 - almost 42 years ago when he was held in detention with me and several other detainees. He died on 5 May 1985, and I had to be a witness in an inquest investigating the cause of his death. So, I dedicate this speech to him, to his memory.

I stand before this House to reaffirm a fundamental truth that lies at the very heart of the ANC's incontrovertible axiomatic position: water is life. It is not a resource to be commodified and monetised. It is a cornerstone of human dignity, equality and social justice. The path and substance of our Constitution, its letter and spirit. As we deliberate on Budget Vote 41, we are guided by section 27, subsection 1, paragraph b of our Constitution, which enshrines the right of every citizen to have access to sufficient water. For the ANC, this is not just a legal obligation; it is a revolutionary moral imperative.

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We view water as the lifeblood of our developmental state agenda. It is the catalyst for inclusive growth, the fuel for industrialisation and the tool with which we will finally achieve true spatial transformation for those still living in the shadows of our past. We must be honest and transparent with the people of South Africa. We are operating in a tightening fiscal environment - a fiscal environment that is vulnerable to low and slow growth trajectory and the rapidly evolving geopolitical factors such as the current Middle East crisis.

This budget reflects a decline, in absolute terms, from R23,4 billion in 2025-26 to R22 billion for the 2026-27 cycle. This represents a 9,1% real reduction. However, the ANC does not view a smaller purse as a reason for smaller dreams and goals. Instead, it is a call for greater efficiency and strategic innovation. We have structured a Medium-Term Expenditure Framework allocation of R130,125 billion over the next three years. Let that sink in. This is the magnitude of our commitment. This is the weight of our investment in the dignity of our people. Let us break that down for the voters and citizens. Seventy-one billion, one hundred and twenty-one million rand from the main account and R59 billion from the

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Water Trading Entity. What does this tell us? It tells us that we are successfully shifting toward a model that leverages financing outside the traditional tax-based baseline. We are mobilising capital to ensure that the tariffs do not run dry, even when the national purse is under pressure.

The allocation of these billions is not a blank check. It is a contract between this government and the people. Every rand must be accounted for. Every project must us closer to a society where the bucket system is a distant memory and where no community goes thirsty. We do not accept retreat. Instead, fiscal pressure is a call for greater efficiency, more rigorous oversight, and strategic innovation. We are tasked with doing more, doing it better, and doing it faster with the resources at our disposal.

The ANC took these creative, forward-looking steps because President Ramaphosa, in his 2026 state of the nation address, said that water is now the single most important issue for many people across South Africa. To herald the establishment of the National Water Crisis Committee, which the President chairs. This is the ANC, the builder of systems and institutions, people's needs first, jobs and services first,

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and economic transformation first. Systems and institutions that have worked before, systems and institutions that will work again, just as the SA Revenue Service, Sars, the Special investigating Unit, SIU, the Reserve Bank, the National Prosecuting Authority, NPA, Auditor-General of SA, Trans-Caledon Tunnel Authority, TCTA, Rand Water, uMngeni-uThukela Water, and other institutions of the state have worked and continue to work. Much more needs to be done to make all of them work for the people. Of course, cynics and naysayers will deny this, but our resolve to serve our people is coded in discipline, resilience, pragmatism, and foresight. Our focus is clear.

While Programme 2 has seen a necessary reduction, we have protected Programme 3, thereby allocating R14,7 billion, nearly 67% of the total vote. This is where the heavy lifting happens. But infrastructure is only as strong as the institutions that manage it. That is why the ANC is championing the establishment of the National Water Resources Infrastructure Agency, NWRIA. We are reforming the water trading entity to ensure that we have state capacity to manage our assets with world-class precision. We are not just talking about pipes and pumps. We are talking about a strategic

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infrastructure pipeline that will change the face of this country. The Lesotho Highlands Phase 2 is intended to secure the social and economic heartbeat of routing. The uMkhomazi Water Scheme will serve the people of KwaZulu-Natal, while the Mokolo Crocodile Water Augmentation Project, the Berg River Voëlvlei Augmentation Project and the Olifants Management Model prove that public-private collaboration can work for the poor.

We can no longer rely solely on the rain. Climate change is a reality, not a theory. It is the Anthropocene that will become the apocalypse, if left unchecked. The ANC's strategy is to aggressively diversify our water mix. We are investing in reuse, desalination, and groundwater extraction. The Water Trading Entity is leading the charge in ensuring that treated effluent is not wasted but recycled back into our economy. We are looking below the earth to our aquifers and toward our west coastlines for desalination. This is the all-of-the-above approach required to ensure water security for the next century.

To support our municipalities, we have committed massive conditional grants, R21,4 billion for the Regional Bulk

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Infrastructure Grant and R17,8 billion for the Water Services Infrastructure Grant. These are the lifelines that enable local government to deliver on the promise of Batho Pele. We are under no illusions about the challenges we face. We acknowledge the delivery risks, the non-bankable projects that stall, the land disputes that delay construction, and the contractor underperformance that wastes public funds. But hear this: the era of business as usual is over. We are mandating project-by-project reporting. We are strengthening bankability assessments before a single spade hits the ground. We are committed to clean governance and transparency. Every cent of this R130 billion must be accounted for. We will not tolerate procurement inefficiencies or community resistance born out of a lack of consultation. We deliver for the public value, or we do not deliver at all.

In closing, let us return to the principles of Batho Pele - people first. Service delivery is not a favour granted by the state from on high to a passive citizenry. It is a human right, birthed in the ANC's 1923 Bill of Rights, transitioned into the 1943 African Claims, the 1955 Freedom Charter, the ANC's 1988 Constitutional Guidelines for a Democratic South

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Africa, and finally enshrined the 1993 Interim Constitution and the present-day 1996 Constitution.

As the ANC, we reaffirm our commitment to a South Africa where no child goes thirsty, where no farm withers for lack of irrigation, and where every factory has the water it needs to create jobs. Despite the fiscal tightening, despite the global economic high winds and headwinds, we are building a water-secure future. We are building a developmental state. We are building a South Africa that puts people's needs first, jobs and services, and economic transformation first. I move that this House adopts this Budget Vote 41. Hon Reddy, have you heard? Thank you.

Mr V G REDDY: Hon Chairperson, the Minister stated that in a few weeks' time we will be celebrating the Constitution. Chapter 2 of the Constitution – the Bill of Rights – guarantees access to every South African. The reality is that millions of South Africans today, 30 years after democracy, are crying out for water, including those that even had water 30 years ago.

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The ANC speaker dedicated his speech to one of his friends who was killed while incarcerated during the years of apartheid. I think that he, together with all the stalwarts who fought in the liberation struggle ... gave up their lives for this Constitution, are turning in their graves today, because what is in the Constitution today is not worth the paper it is written on, just like the budget that we are about to see.

In response to this budget, I've titled my message today, vote MK, the only way to bring real change. Today, we are asked to choose between two things – the budget on paper, like the Constitution, or the lived reality of our people on the ground, because outside of this Parliament, Minister, people are not living inside reports or presentations. They are living with dry taps, they are living with sewage spills, they are living with collapsing services and daily humiliation.

I stand here not only as a Member of Parliament. I stand here as someone who spent 22 years of my life as a councillor, working directly with communities in eThekweni. I stand here as someone who served on the board of uMngeni Water for 11 years.

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I stand here as somebody with a proud history of choosing the people over position and power, of fighting for communities, of raising the frustrations of residents in council chambers, in committees, in the streets and now in this Parliament. That is why I'm in the MK Party, because the MK Party is rooted among the people.

My own sister, Mala, lives in Shallcross in Durban. For more than a year, her community has suffered from an unreliable supply of water. However, this is not only about Shallcross. It is about Hammanskraal, it is about Chatsworth and Umlazi.

It's about communities in Johannesburg living with water cuts and collapsing infrastructure. It is about villages in Limpopo, townships in the Free State and communities across South Africa that no longer trust that water will come from their taps tomorrow morning. This is now a national crisis and our people are tired, Minister.

When the MK Party first raised the alarm and called this a national water crisis, the Minister rejected it. She denied there was a crisis. While communities were crying for water, the Government of National Unity, GNU, was busy arguing over

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terminology. That denial caused outrage among suffering communities because our people did not need politicians to tell them there was a crisis. They were living the crisis every single day.

Two years later, Ramaphosa himself was forced to admit what the MK Party had already said; that South Africa is indeed facing a national water crisis. However, once again this government has failed the people, because instead of appointing engineers, water experts and people with a proven track record, Mr Ramaphosa appoints politicians to lead the so-called National Water Crisis intervention team; the very same politicians under whose watch the crisis has developed.

Now, government acts surprised that nothing has changed. You cannot solve an engineering crisis with political slogans. You cannot solve a water crisis with press conferences and task teams filled with politicians. That is why the intervention is failing.

The MK Party believes South Africa needs a real national water crisis team led by experts, engineers, experienced professionals, not politicians protecting one another, not

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comrades deploying comrades, not another structure created for headlines while communities continue suffering, because our people do not drink politics, my dear friends. They drink water.

The MK Party is "unfuckwithable" because we are not disconnected elites speaking theory from boardrooms. We are among the people. We know their pain. We know their anger, and we are not afraid to speak uncomfortable truths in this House.

Hon Skosana from the MK Party interjected today because he said in his area right now there is no water. That is the reality that we as the MK Party talk about. We're not here talking airy-fairy stories.

Today, I want to teach this House something. There is a difference between revolution and what South Africa has today. What we have today is not revolution. It is what I call "reforlution" – a mixture of reform and revolution.

Politicians speak revolutionary language but protect the same broken system. That is not revolution. It is survival politics.

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A revolution changes peoples' conditions. A revolution restores dignity. A revolution changes who benefits from the economy.

However, 30 years later, millions of our people struggle for basic water and sanitation. It is a fact. That is why the great revolutionary Amilcar Cabral warned us: "Tell no lies, claim no easy victories."

Yet, every year, this House celebrates plans while communities continue suffering. The MK Party cannot support a budget that does not fundamentally change the lives of our people. What is the purpose of billions in allocations while communities still queue for water? What is the purpose of reports while wastewater plans collapse? What is the purpose of speeches about progress while residents still protest for water? This crisis, Minister, is man-made. This is about corruption, political deployment, poor maintenance, weak government.

This debate also reminds South Africans of 2022, because in 2022 the ANC used its majority to protect Mr Ramaphosa.

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The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Mr W Horn): Hon Reddy, just hold on. I have a hand there at the back. Please take your seat for a moment. Hon member, why do you want to be recognised?

Ms A M VAN ZYL: House Chairperson, I just want to check if the hon Reddy did indeed use unparliamentary language a couple of minutes ago, and I'd like you to rule on that. I would not like to repeat it myself. Thank you.

The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Mr W Horn): Yes, hon Reddy, there was a word I didn't catch, hopefully properly.

Mr V G REDDY: The word is "unfuckwithable". You can check. It's in the dictionary. Google it. "Unfuckwithable" is a word in the dictionary. "Unfuckwithable". It means that you are steady and you are steadfast. Please check it.

The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Mr W Horn): Thank you. Please proceed with your speech. I'll consider the matter and if necessary, come back.

Mr V G REDDY: Today, the highest court in the land found Mr Ramaphosa wanting ... a constitutional delinquent. Yet,

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instead of accountability, the ANC is once again trying to protect him. The only difference now is that they no longer have the numbers alone. So, they rely on their GNU partners like the DA; parties that criticise the ANC during the day, but protect the ANC when it matters most. Why? It's because Cabinet positions and political comfort is more important to them.

Helen Zille is swimming in the streets of Johannesburg. The DA knows that communities are suffering, yet they're going to come here today and they're going to support this budget. Why? It's because of the Cabinet positions.

This is not a revolution. It is a "reforlution". The upcoming local government elections is directly linked to this debate, because on the 4th of November, South Africans will not simply vote for councillors, my friends. They will decide whether they want more excuses or whether they want real change.

The MK Party says clearly today, vote MK because all these parties have had a chance. They have failed you and the people are suffering because of them. The MK Party will give you real change. I thank you.

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IsiXhosa:

Nksk. F MBIKO: Molweni.

English:

As the 2026-27 Budget makes its way through Parliament, numerous speeches will be delivered. As we undertake our business, let us remember why we are here. We are the appropriations body. After taxpayers play their part, we decide how much of their funds goes where and for what purpose. We open the public purse to government and we do not just deliver words. We determine its destiny. That should not be lost on us. It is not lost on me.

The ongoing indignity of dry taps, the water tanker mafia and sewage spills across communities strikes at the heart of South Africa's project, and that is a need to further ... rights and opportunities for all.

It is unacceptable in our hard-fought democracy that there is one dry tap, let alone a new normal across South Africa. One street of a polluted body of water is one too many.

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It is also depraved that the basic human right to water has flown into the hands of mafia criminals. As we prepare to send R41 billion to the Department of Water and Sanitation, if we allow these errors to go on unabated, we too will be complicit in the denial of rights. Let us not allow that to happen.

The DA is concerned, as the department's allocation of resources does not meet the crisis South Africans are facing. While communities are without working infrastructure, as drinking water goes down the drain and sewage enters homes, the department will reduce infrastructure spending by R1,7 billion this year. Tell that to the communities across our country living with dry taps, that queue at a water tanker, and that live in filth.

The department's own reports indicate that the quality of infrastructure has regressed. As we await delayed reports on drinking water infrastructure and updated figures on water leaks, we know our wastewater systems are in a worse condition than in 2023.

In its annual performance plan, the department also touts interim results that the quality of drinking water has

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improved in the country. The irony is that the residents of Mangaung receive half of the water they pay for. Residents of Nelson Mandela receive 40% of the water they pay for. The residents of eThekweni receive 35% of the water they pay for.

What is worse is that the department does not have the figures readily available for residents not in metros. The situation on the ground in small towns, dorpiess and villages is therefore far worse than we know.

What the budget also fails to address is the critical shortage of technicians and scientists required to fix our country's broken infrastructure. When the department last appeared to account for this matter, it had a 30% vacancy rate for technicians and scientists, which tripled National Treasury's recommendation. The DA has asked for updated figures on this and we're still awaiting answers.

The department claims to be addressing our water crisis in words but ... in action. They cut infrastructure budgets and leave no technicians to fix infrastructure. What is further troubling is that despite being elevated to the Presidency, the crisis remains the same.

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We do not have a national crisis plan. We do not know when the plan is coming or what it contains. What we have had is nothing new but existing government plans. The crisis plan is also reliant on technicians and scientists, where there is a huge shortage. We again call on the President to release the plan so that we can debate it here in Parliament.

We have all been elected here to do right by South Africans. The welfare of our people is our primary responsibility. I repeat, hon members, we open the public purse to government. South Africans have entrusted us and we must ensure that every rand and cent we send to government better their lives and is accounted for. No more delays. No more excuses. We need the delivery of services now. As the DA, we will keep on fighting.

IsiXhosa:

Siza kulwa ukuze bonke abantu baseMzantsi Afrika bafumane iinkonzo ezibalulekileyo zamanzi acocekileyo. I-DA iseza kulwa. Enkosi.

English:

Thank you very much.

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Ms B K DIALE: House Chair, greetings to the Commander-In-Chief, commissars and fighters of economic revolution. The EFF rejects Budget Vote 41 of the Department of Water and Sanitation.

Two months ago the rural villages of Lower and Upper Zinquka, Lenye, Zanyokhwe, Mkhubiso and other in Keiskammahoek, under the Amahlothi Local Municipality in the Eastern Cape, came to a standstill as communities there protested to have water in their taps, taps which had been dry for months before.

In villages such as Mahlathi in Dinani and Gawula in the Greater Giyani Local Municipality in Limpopo, residents congregate daily next to burst pipes and communal taps to collect water, because 32 years of attainment of political freedom this government has not seen it fit to provide these communities with clean drinkable water.

In the Maquassi Hills Local Municipality in the North West residents have resorted to use manholes to access water.

In the very same province in North West, the SA Human Rights Commission, SHRC, reported that lack of access of water has

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become so dire that communities in all four districts of North West has persistent water shortages over prolonged period of time.

In KwaZulu-Natal people living in the Nyathi section, Inanda, have to queue for water every Friday because the government ... [Inaudible.] ... Minister has failed to provide these communities with water.

In Hammanskraal in Gauteng, despite persistent protests by that community, the water situation has not been stabilised.

We can go on and on with the list of various areas in all provinces, the bottom line is that the state has been unable to make this basic and fundamental human right accessible to a large number of our people.

The department is unable to do so because it does not have the requisite skills and political will to resolve the water crisis in the country. Almost all the water boards are dysfunctional and are used for political leverage by the people's and political leadership of the department.

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The main interest is not to ensure functional institutions, but is to create an enabling environment for looting of public funds by those who are in close proximity to the political leadership.

We know for a fact that most municipalities' ability to resolve water crisis is crippled by the water tanks, extortion mafias and centre of which is politically connected individuals who are making a kill from water tank tenders.

For those individuals, to restoring water for water infrastructure means the literal closing of the looting taps and working with politicians they are content in making sure that there's never sustainable supply of water to our communities.

The Minister knows this, municipalities know this too, but no one is taking any action to stop this practice.

The EFF has no hop whatsoever that this Government of National Unity, GNU, will in fact help resolve the problems faced by our communities as conditions continue to deteriorate.

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The most recent intervention is the establishment of the National Water Crisis Committee, whose actual composition and terms of reference are yet to be determined.

A large amount of revenue that could be used to improve the lives of our people ends up in the hands of the so-called bulk water suppliers.

Private ownership of bulk water supply must be abolished. Government must take full responsibility for managing water resources.

The Green, Blue and No drop assessment and consequent report have shown how severe the situation has become, with continued deterioration recorded, despite annual budget allocations.

Failing municipalities, according to this report, either do not provide corrective plans or fail to implement them and it simply becomes business as usual.

Chairperson, the budget vote report says that the MTDP will prioritise restoring and maintaining wastewater and water treatment plant that will reduce raw sewer discharge into

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rivers and upgrade stormwater and drainage systems linked to sanitation failures. But how is it going to be implemented with this constrained budget that it has been allocated?

We do not support this budget vote, and we are not convinced that the allocation will be adequately utilised to provide clean water and proper sanitation for our people consistently. I thank you, Chair.

Mr N M HADEBE: House Chairperson, this budget debate takes place at a time when South Africa faces a deepening water crisis. Across the country communities are experiencing collapsing water infrastructure, sewerage spillages, intermittent supply and deteriorating wastewater treatment systems.

All of these have also been worsened by the recent floods the country experienced over the past few weeks.

There is a growing concern about infrastructure maintenance backlog, governance weaknesses, financial instability within municipalities and water entities, and the urgent need for long-term water security planning.

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The IFP acknowledges the department's efforts to expand bulk water infrastructure project and improve access to sanitation services. But all of these promises have not been related to actionable outcomes.

The people are becoming increasingly frustrated by the gap between the budget allocations and the actual service delivery.

Too many projects remain delayed, incomplete or poorly maintained while our communities continue to suffer.

One only needs to look at the ongoing crisis surrounding the uMkhomazi water project in KwaZulu-Natal. This project has been spoken about for years as a solution to water insecurity affecting large parts of eThekweni, uMgungundlovu and surrounding districts. Yet, despite repeated commitments and substantial public investment, communities continue to experience water interruptions, infrastructure delays and uncertainty about completion times.

This is an example that South Africa does not suffer from a shortage of plans, but rather we suffer from poor

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coordination, weak implementation and inadequate accountability.

One of the most serious concerns repeatedly raised is the collapse of the municipal water management capacity. Many municipalities are unable to maintain ageing infrastructure, recover revenue or retain qualified technical personnel.

In some areas, wastewater treatment plants are operating beyond capacity, leading to pollution of rivers and environmental degradation. This has severe consequences for the environment, public health, agriculture, tourism and local economies.

We believe that the Republic's water crisis is no longer about infrastructure, it is fundamentally about governance. Billions of rands have been spent over the years, yet leaks continue, nonrevenue water remains extremely high and many communities still lack access to clean water.

The continued loss of skilled engineers, technicians and artisans within municipalities remain deeply worrying. Water infrastructure cannot be maintained without skilled and competent technical expertise.

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Furthermore, rural communities continue to bare the greatest burden of underdevelopment. Too many households still lack dignified sanitation services, while women and children in some areas continue to travel long distances to access water.

This cannot continue in a democratic South Africa, it needs to change. We need stronger maintenance programmes, professionalisation of technical appointments, accelerated infrastructure delivery, stricter consequence management for corruption and negligence, and enhance oversight over municipalities and water entities.

Water security must become a national priority grounded in competence, accountability and long-term sustainability.

In consideration of the issues we have raised, the IFP supports the budget vote. I thank you.

Ms J S PETERSEN: Hon House Chairperson, hon Minister, hon Deputy Minister, hon members and hon members of the public, I rise today on behalf of the PA to debate Vote No 41: Water and Sanitation. A Vote that speaks with a doubt, dignity and the

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survival of our people. Hon Minister, we will support this budget, but we must raise our concerns.

Water is life and sanitation is dignity. Yet failures in this department continue to endanger South Africans and weaken our democracy. Hon Minister, the lack of maintenance of water infrastructure has left communities vulnerable. Burst pipes, leaking reservoirs and collapsing sewage systems are not only inconveniences, they are public health hazards.

Vote No 41 must prioritise maintenance not just new projects because neglect turns infrastructure into danger. Rural and township communities remain excluded. Millions of South Africans still fetch water from unsafe sources, whilst sanitation facilities are inadequate or nonexistent. This is a violation of the constitutional rights and perpetuates inequality.

Corruption and mismanagement have crippled municipal water delivery. Funds meant for clean water and safe sanitation are wasted leaving communities with dry taps and polluted rivers. The system as it stands, hon Minister, often feels setup for failure rather than service.

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Hon members, Vote No 41 is not about budgets, it is about protecting lives. A government that fails to deliver water and sanitation fails its people. Vote allocations must ensure accountability, sustainability and inclusion so that every South African has access to clean water and dignified sanitation.

Hon Minister, we must commit to a water and sanitation system that protects health, restores dignity and secures the future of our nation. The PA supports this budget. Thank you.

Mr W W WESSELS: Hon House Chairperson, the Minister is absolutely correct that the biggest part of the cause of the crisis where people and millions of people do not have access to water and reliable access to water lies on a local level. It is with regard to the distribution of water.

Hon House Chairperson, that the hon Dithube should be careful to boast so much about the ANC and the ANC's Batho Pele's principles. For it is especially ANC-governed municipalities that are responsible for the lack of governance with regards to water management. It is also the neglect of those municipalities that caused the problem with regards to

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leakages, deteriorating infrastructure, water waste and water plants that are wasting more sewage into our very scarce and important water sources.

Hon House Chairperson, the Minister should also take note of the fact that although it is on a distribution level and that is where the biggest crisis lies, we cannot deny that the department also plays and play the role in the crisis that we are experiencing.

The delays in terms of the Lesotho Highland Water Project especially Phase 2 which is more than a decade behind schedule is also responsible for the problem. The Great Letaba River Water Development Project that is almost also a decade behind schedule is also responsible for this problem.

The hon Reddy should however go and ask the president of his party when and why those delays took plays when his party's president was a President of South Africa.

Hon House Chairperson, it is also not true that water boards are optimally functioning. Many water boards are not even achieving their performance targets, and they do not obtain

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clean or unqualified audit opinions. It is not because of outstanding debt of municipalities solely. To put it like that outstanding debt is not a cause for adverse audit findings. There is a managerial problem at our water boards as well.

Hon House Chairperson, another problem that contributes to this water crises also lie with the department and that is the regulatory toothlessness of the department. We welcome the fact that some heavy fines have been issued recently to municipalities that transgress but it is not enough. It is delayed action that also leads to this crisis.

Hon Minister section 63 of the Water Services Act should be aggressively utilised rather than spending time overreaching with regulations in terms of recreational usage of public dams which will entail losses of jobs and will not serve the purpose intended to serve although it is noble. Those regulations are not important currently. Rather use section 63, issue fines and see to it that municipalities comply to legislation and stop their mismanagement and that they start to effect the Batho Pele principles towards the people that they are supposed to serve. I thank you.

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Ms M P KOBE: Hon Chairperson, over the past two weeks South Africans have once again witnessed devastating consequences of severe flooding across several parts of this country. Our roads have been washed away, water and sanitation infrastructure severely damaged. Communities displaced and already fragile municipalities pushed beyond their limits. These events have once again exposed the deep vulnerability of municipalities that continue to struggle with maintenance backlogs, inadequate storm water systems and poor disaster preparedness.

Climate related disasters are becoming more frequent, more intense and more costly. This reality demands a far more resilient and proactive and future focused approach to water infrastructure planning. South Africa cannot continue operating in a cycle of crises response while critical infrastructure deteriorates and vulnerable communities bare the brand of this government failure.

Now while the report correctly identifies many of the systemic challenges confronting the sector, government must now be more intentional and move beyond diagnoses and reporting towards implementation, reliability and long-term sustainability. This

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must happen at a municipality level. See while we congratulate this department for transferring a 100% of its grants to municipalities that is something that is not worth celebrating. For in reality, no matter how much money we transfer to municipalities, we will not solve the problem.

Hon Minister as it stands municipalities have returned R1 billion worth of water infrastructure grants back to Treasury while South African taps run dry. So, this is not merely a problem money can fix, but it is instead a governance problem. Hon Minister, the reality is it is a governance problem in ANC-led municipalities where they do not have the capacity to fix our water crisis. They failed their people.

From Machabeng Municipality where there is an unmitigated debt crisis with water boards to Polokwane Municipality where under the incapable Mayor John Mpe, hundreds of our residents earlier this year were admitted to hospital and clinics due to water contamination.

If an ANC Minister does not have an honest sit down with ANC mayors, councillors and MMCs, South Africa will continue to call this department a failure.

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Although we remain deeply concerned with the many issues in this department, including the continued collapse of wastewater systems, declining Green Drop and Blue Drop performance, infrastructure backlogs and the widespread of pollution, we are however, encouraged by the department's recent interventions. Including a more increased focus on converting direct grants into indirect grants in municipalities that lack implementation capacity. For in many cases water boards and capable implementing agents are better positioned to deliver infrastructure projects effectively, efficiently and within budget.

As a dedicated member of the portfolio committee, it will be remiss of me of not acknowledge the various interventions of this department. I would like to congratulate the department on the finalisation of the board to the newly established National Water Resources Infrastructure Branch, NWRIB. It is a much-needed agency and we need stability there.

The recent opening of the Senqu Bridge. I like to congratulate the department on that because it signals progress on the much needed, Lesotho Highlands Water Project. Although we remain deeply concerned with the current water crisis as ActionSA we

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cannot deny South Africans a budget that is desperately needed to curb these crises. We, therefore, support this budget. I thank you.

The DEPUTY MINISTER OF WATER AND SANITATION (Mr I S Seithlholo): Hon Pemmy Majodina, Deputy Minister Mahlobbo, chairperson of the portfolio committee, Mr Leon Basson, Cabinet colleagues, the director general, DG, of the department as well as senior managers, the leadership of our entities, leadership of various stakeholders in the sector and civil society, and South Africans.

From the onset, hon Chairperson, we must echo our department's commitment to ensure that water flows to the taps of every home and every business in all corners of our country. But our hard work and commitment must be met with better governance in municipalities.

Municipalities play a key constitutional role in bringing water to the people of our country. For water to flow, municipalities must be functional. We simply cannot ignore this truth.

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Hon Chairperson, for us to ensure water security for all, the department must continue to be uncompromising in its regulatory role. The department has to be strengthening its regulatory function and making its regulatory actions more consistent.

This has resulted in an increased number of civil actions and criminal charges against municipalities for sewage pollution as well as action against industrial polluters. The number of criminal cases, not only against the municipalities as entities but also against mayors and municipal managers in their personal capacity, is expected to increase further as directed by the hon President in his State of the Nation Address. For us to ensure water security for all, there must be this level of accountability.

Hon Chairperson, the department has 96 active criminal cases for sewage pollution involving 53 water service authorities across all nine provinces. This follows non-responsiveness of the municipalities to notices and directives.

In 53 of these cases, an investigation is currently underway with a further 42 that have been referred to the National

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Prosecuting Authority for a decision to prosecute. In one case, the National Prosecuting Authority, NPA, has decided to include charges against the municipal manager in his personal capacity.

This level of accountability is our bold commitment to ensuring water security for all as access to water is a sacrosanct right.

A further 62 possible criminal cases are being investigated involving mining operations, agricultural operations, industry and dams, including the failed tailings facility of Jagersfontein, which is currently in court.

In July this year, we will be publishing the National Polluter Register with the intention to name and shame polluters. This will include information on convictions, including plea and sentence agreements, directives and the publishing of critical systems with non-compliant effluent as per the Green Drop Report.

Hon Chairperson, this is part also of our effort to ensure that we protect our water resources and improve raw water

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quality and security. Hon members, South Africa currently receives on average 800 million cubic metres of water annually into the integrated Vaal River system from the Lesotho Highlands Water Project as part of improving the country's water security.

This is at a significant cost to South African taxpayers. It is therefore unfathomable and unacceptable how this clean blue water that we receive from Lesotho is diluted by dirty grey water in the Vaal River system.

Hon Chair, dirty water costs a lot of money to treat to drinking standards, which means it is more expensive to sell in bulk to water service authorities. In the end, homes and businesses pay more for water. That is a terrible way of doing business as there is no return on investment.

We must therefore continue to work hard and together to fight the pollution of our water resources. Water is a precious resource that gives us life and it is therefore our collective duty to protect this precious resource.

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Hon Chairperson and members, the department is pleased to report a satisfactory process in the control of aquatic alien invasive plant species in Hartbeespoort Dam, caused by upstream pollution emanating from dysfunctional and critical wastewater treatment works from the three Gauteng metros as well as Mogale City Local Municipality.

Our interventions implemented through Magalie's Water in partnership with the Centre for Biological Control of Rhodes University are yielding results. These interventions include the physical removal of the alien invasive plant species, the release of biological control agents, which are insects that weaken the invasive species, the deployment of a nanobubble technology, which is oxygen gas bubbles that bind with ammonia and other elements to improve water quality.

While the project has yielded many benefits, the unsatisfactory quality of effluent has not yet significantly improved despite enforcement action including criminal charges. We therefore call upon the three metros and Mogale City Local Municipality to improve their wastewater treatment system so as to not continue to pollute our dams, thus reversing our gains.

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Hon Chairperson, the establishment of Catchment Management Agencies separates the water resource regulator from the Municipal Support Function of the department. The Catchment Management Agencies, CMAs, will implement strategies to improve the resilience of catchments to perform their ecological function, including taking regulatory action against polluters.

The Vaal-Orange Catchment Management Agency has developed an action plan focusing on the Vaal River system with increased monitoring and evaluation of compliance of waste discharges into the system, together with enforcement.

This will not only include municipalities, but also industry and mines. The remediation measures, compliance and enforcement activities of the CMAs, coupled with the support from the department to municipal sectors, as well as the reforms that are currently being undertaken in the water sector, should progressively lead to an improvement in this catchment.

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The Vaal River Anti-Pollution Forum, launched in October 2024, will also help in ensuring that gains are made in improving water quality within the system.

Hon Chairperson, to aid in the remediation of pollution, the department has begun with the development of a mitigation charge that is provided for under the pricing strategy. The mitigation charge is a strategic intervention to address specific issues in high-pollution areas and will be piloted in the Vaal Catchment, among others.

However, hon Chairperson and members, these efforts must be met with functioning municipalities, because it is municipalities who are the cornerstone of water and sanitation. We must, therefore, as a nation, work towards better municipal governance, and it is for this reason that we must encourage all South Africans to be in a position to elect councillors who are fit for purpose in order to safeguard our water and sanitation infrastructure and delivery.

I thank you.

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Rev K R J MESHOE: Hon Chairperson and hon members, the ACDP has consistently affirmed that water is merely not a commodity, but water is life and the essence of human dignity. Access to clean water is a constitutional right, and together with sanitation, improve the self-worth of all individuals and their human dignity.

Last November, we welcomed the establishment of the National Water Resources Infrastructure Agency as a step towards stronger governance, but we cautioned that corruption and poor project management would continue to undermine delivery.

Water mafias should not be tolerated in this country because they frustrate all plans and projects that government attempts to implement or to provide clean drinking water to all our people. Water mafias are enemies of all South Africans and should be crushed by relevant authorities mandated to secure all infrastructure and our people.

The department's Vote 41 allocation for 2026-27 stands at nearly R22 billion, rising to nearly R28 billion by 2028-29, with the stated purpose of ensuring equitable access to water and sanitation services. This is a significant investment, yet

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the question still remains whether this investment will translate into clean water in the taps.

Recent reports paint a troubling picture. It appears that water treatment systems graded as excellent or good every year get less and more systems go into a critical state. That means it is failing to adequately treat sewage before releasing sewage back into the environment.

Recent medical and environmental studies highlight how these failures directly increase child mortality, gender inequality, and community vulnerability across Africa. There's been nearly R15 billion worth in water losses and R1,7 billion wasted in widespread irregularities.

The practical consequences of these numbers erode public trust and dignity. Communities across the Free State and Northern Cape in particular face unsafe drinking water and collapsing infrastructure. Bacteria, viruses, and parasites in sewage infect communities through drinking water, food preparation ... [Time expired.]

Thank you.

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Ms C T NONTENJA: Chairperson, water is not a privilege, it is a constitutional right. It is the foundation of public health, economic development, agriculture, education and human dignity. Yet across South Africa, communities are living with dry taps, unsafe drinking water, failing wastewater treatment plants and rivers contaminated by sewage and pollution.

The report paints a gloomy picture of a sector under severe pressure weakened by poor planning, failing infrastructure projects, financial instability and weak governance. The South African Human Rights Commission has described the deterioration of wastewater systems as nothing but a disaster. Yet despite this national emergency, government has reduced the department's budget by almost 2 billion.

While the department has identified municipalities as one of the weakest links in the water sector, the UDM believes that the department is not doing enough to address this national disaster. This, despite the fact that the UDM wrote to all three spheres of government.

IsiXhosa:

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Iilali ezi15 azinamanzi acocekileyo kwaye zixhomekeke kumanzi athuthwa zilori. Lo mba weelori zamanzi onento yokwenza nokutyisana kwamaqabane kaTambo kwezi zinikimaxabiso ...

English:

... poses a serious public health risk. With a high likelihood of waterborne disease spreading through the 15 affected villages. Water from the tankers dispersed by the municipalities is visibly contaminated.

IsiXhosa:

La manzi agcwele izabonkolo.

English:

And this is not an isolated matter but a countrywide disaster affecting areas like Johannesburg. If the residents of the biggest metro in Africa walk long distances in search of water, imagine the situation in rural areas and informal settlements.

The UDM, calls for an emergency national water recovery plan, focused on fixing wastewater plants, repairing leaking infrastructure and enforcing accountability in failing

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municipalities and ring-fencing water infrastructure budgets to stop corruption and underspending.

Water security is essential for public health, dignity and economic growth, and it must be treated as a national priority for all South Africans. I thank you.

Mrs N L HLAZO-WEBSTER: Chairperson ... [Inaudible.] ... experience is not simply water shortage in South Africa. It's a collapse of governance. In South Africa, citizens wake up at strange hours to fill buckets before the water disappears again. Families queue at water tankers not knowing when supply will return. And communities live with sewage flowing into rivers, into leaking reservoirs, with collapsing pipes, with wastewater systems that aren't functioning properly.

And yet, year after year billions continue to flow into the water sector. This budget allocates substantial funding toward bulk infrastructure, it allocates towards municipal support, towards long-term, water security projects.

But the question South Africans are asking is: If there is money that's being allocated, why are the water systems

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collapsing? Because the crisis isn't primarily about funding, it's about governance, it's about accountability, it's about institutional failure and across the country municipalities are failing to maintain critical infrastructure. Water losses in many municipalities are exceeding 40%, meaning treated water is leaking into the ground before it ever reaches household.

Wastewater treatment systems continue to deteriorate, and, in the meanwhile, communities are exposed to serious public health risks.

What frustrates citizens even more is that government increasingly celebrates crisis management as though it is progress. What I mean by this is, for example, the reopening of the Brixton Reservoir in Johannesburg, which was presented as a breakthrough moment, but residents were forced to endure months of outages, of uncertainty and delays before repairs were actually finally completed. Even now, Johannesburg Water acknowledges that dozens of reservoirs and towers across the city are still leaking.

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South Africans are not asking for miracles, they are asking for competence and governance. So, the problem is not that infrastructure requires maintenance only. Every country maintains infrastructure. The problem is that in South Africa, maintenance is delayed until systems collapse. Emergency interventions become permanent, and nobody is actually ever held accountable for the years of neglect that caused the crisis in the first place.

We recently actually asked the President in the House if there is no consistent water supply in Johannesburg at the end of the year, who is he going to fire? And we didn't get a straightforward answer and that's why BOSA believes that the solution has to go beyond infrastructure spending alone.

We need a professionalised water governance system. We need stronger oversight of municipalities and water boards. We need proper maintenance planning, and we need consequences for procurement failures and transparency around project delivery and infrastructure performance. We need intervention by the Water and Sanitation Department, when it is necessary to do so, because without accountability, infrastructure budgets alone will never be able to resolve this crisis. I thank you.

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Ms T L MARAWU: Chairperson, water is life, sanitation is dignity. Water is a constitutional right. Yet for millions of South Africans, especially in rural communities, informal settlement and struggling municipalities, access to clean water and proper sanitation remains unreliably and deeply unequal. Too many families still live with dry taps, collapsing infrastructure in sewage flowing through their communities. That is painful reality facing our people. Our crisis is not about the lack of rain, it's about the management of rain we receive.

The ATM has consistently warned that South Africa's water crisis would worsen if government failed to act decisively. We have repeatedly called for stronger investment in infrastructure maintenance, improve rural sanitation, consequence management and equitable access to water resources. Today, the evidence before this House confirms that those warnings were justified.

Hon members, the department's own reports reveals serious delay in bulk water infrastructure project because of procurement failures, contractor disputes and inadequate planning. The people of KwaMashu cannot drink procurement

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delays. They cannot survive on excuses while sewage runs through their streets and taps remain dry.

In Hammanskraal, residents have faced years of unsafe drinking water, including contamination concerns linked to cholera outbreaks and failing infrastructure. People of Makhanda are still facing water crisis. The people of Mdantsane as well have faced recurring water interruptions and sanitation challenges, caused by municipal infrastructure failures.

The ATM therefore believes that this Budget Vote therefore cannot continue as business as usual. South Africans expect solutions, accountability and urgent interventions.

Firstly, there must be greater focus on maintenance and leak reduction. Billions of litres of water are lost every year because of aging infrastructure, leaking pipes and poor municipal management.

Secondly, government must urgently prioritise the recovery of failing waste treatment plants. Communities cannot continue living with unsafe sanitation system that threaten public health and environmental safety. The department must invest

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more on localised solutions like; boreholes, rainwater harvesting, smart metering to build resilience at the community level.

The ATM maintains that accountability can no longer remain an optional public relation exercise, while communities queue with buckets and sewage flows through the streets as though collapses become government policy.

Municipalities receiving billions in water and sanitation funding must be compelled to publish clear measurable and publicly accessible infrastructure and reliability plans instead of endless promises, launch events and excuse-filled press conferences after every crisis.

Hon Minister, let's work hard and ensure that in this country, a child cannot choose between education and a bucket of water. I thank you.

Mr S J MOORE: Hon House Chairperson, South Africa is in a water crisis, and this is not a slogan. It is the reality of residents with dry taps who do not know when they will have water, businesses that cannot operate reliably and

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municipalities failing in their ability to provide one of the most basic services of government. Vote 41, therefore, must be judged against the seriousness of this crisis.

South Africa cannot afford paralysis in the water and sanitation sector. We need this department to function, Water Boards to deliver, bulk projects to move and wastewater systems to be repaired. But Parliament must also be clear, a Budget Vote is not a blank cheque. The question before us is not whether South Africa needs a functioning water and sanitation sector; of course it does. The question is whether this budget and this department will deliver with the urgency, transparency and accountability that the crisis demands.

A national water crisis cannot be answered with broken promises. In February, we were promised a National Water Crisis Action Plan. We are now in May. I submitted a Promotion of Access to Information Act, Paia, to The Presidency to get a copy of the plan, but they instead requested an extension until June. This is all while South Africans continue to suffer.

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We are also plagued by a department that cannot complete projects on time. Year after year, there are delays and added costs. The uMkhomazi Bulk Water Project is one of the clearest examples. This project is not a luxury. It is critical to increase the available water supply to the uMngeni-uThukela Water system, which supports eThekwini, the Ugu District Municipality and the wider regional economy. As the uMkhomazi Bulk Water Project is set to be delayed, the consequences will not only be seen in budget tables, but they will also be felt by communities, businesses and municipalities that need reliable water.

From small towns to metros, the stories of municipal neglect are the same. In my hometown of Johannesburg, the DA has had to go to court to force the municipality to do its job. As the city is now effectively broke, this is what happens when water infrastructure is underfunded, poorly maintained and treated as a political afterthought. While Johannesburg is damming, let me speak about another metro, eThekwini.

At the end of March, eThekwini's non-revenue water, NRW, stood at 55,3%. That means more than half of the water in the system is not generating revenue. It is being lost through leaks,

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bursts, illegal connections, metering failures, billing failures and administrative weakness. So yes, eThekweni needs more water. That is why uMkhomazi matters but it also needs to stop losing the water it already has. This is not only a KwaZulu-Natal problem.

In Gauteng, the city of Tshwane should be a warning to every metro in the country. As of March 2026, Tshwane's NRW had risen to 45%, a 10% reduction in a single year, total losses to 42,7% and physical losses to 34%. Colleagues, in plain English, Tshwane is losing water, treated water, through leaks, bursts and failing infrastructure at a scale no responsible government can defend. Tshwane is losing more water through physical losses alone than better-run municipalities lose in total NRW.

That difference matters, colleagues. It is billions of litres of treated water being allowed to run into the ground. It is potentially billions of rand lost instead of being used to fix infrastructure, improve services and stabilise municipal finances. So, when the Tshwane coalition speaks about success, residents should test those claims against the water disaster

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unfolding in their metro. This is the central lesson for
Vote 41.

South Africa does not only need more water in dams and bulk
systems ...

The CHAIRPERSON (Ms C Labuschagne): Hon Moore, will you please
take a seat. Hon member, what is your point of order?

Ms M P KOBE: Hon House Chair, is the member willing to take a
question?

The CHAIRPERSON (Ms C Labuschagne): Hon Moore, are you willing
to take a question?

Mr S J MOORE: No, I've offered many times to talk to you about
this, hon Kobe.

South Africa does not need more water in dams and bulk
systems. We need more water reaching taps. We need
municipalities that can protect infrastructure, collect
revenue, repair leaks, manage pressure and account for every
litre they receive. This is why this budget must be judged by

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delivery, not by how many plans are announced, not by how many meetings are held and certainly not by how many promises are repeated, but by whether projects are completed, losses are reduced ...

The CHAIRPERSON (Ms C Labuschagne): Hon Moore, will you please take a seat. Hon Reddy, what is your point of order?

Mr V G REDDY: Hon Speaker, I wanted to know if the speaker will take a question because he's convinced me that he's going to be voting against the budget. And he's put up a very good argument that we should not support the budget. I just wanted to question, please, if you may, thank you.

The CHAIRPERSON (Ms C Labuschagne): Hon Moore, do you want to ...

Mr S J MOORE: Chair, I won't take your question from hon Reddy or anyone else.

So again, this budget must be judged by delivery, not by how many plans are announced, not by how many meetings are held, not by how many promises are repeated, but by whether projects

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are completed, losses are reduced, wastewater works are restored and residents receive reliable water services.

The DA's approach is guided by clear expectations. Major projects like the uMkhomazi Bulk Water Project must have transparent timelines, public milestones and regular reporting to Parliament. Where capital funds are reduced, delayed or shifted, Parliament must be told why. Is the project genuinely not ready, or is the state failing to implement? Support to municipalities must be tied to measurable results.

Municipalities cannot continue losing 40%, 50% or more of their water while national government treats this as business as usual.

Hon Chairperson, the water sector must succeed. In the Government of National Unity, GNU, we have a responsibility to act constructively where progress is possible, but constructiveness does not mean silent. We will raise concerns where capital projects are delayed. We will demand accountability where municipalities fail. We will insist that water losses are treated as financial, infrastructure and governance crises.

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The test of this budget is not whether money appears on a page, the test is whether water reaches people. South Africa needs working infrastructure and reliable water. South Africa really needs Vote 41 to become a delivery budget. I thank you.

Mr K S RAMAILA: Hon Chair, I know some people refer to me as Ramalia. I must make it clear, I'm Ramaila.

The CHAIRPERSON (Ms C Labuschagne): My apologies, hon.

Mr K S RAMAILA: Hon Chair, hon Minister, Deputy Minister Mahlobo and Deputy Minister Seithloho, hon members of the Portfolio Committee on Water and Sanitation, the chief executive officers, CEOs, of entities of the Department of Water and Sanitation, DWS, and fellow South Africans.

Maybe Chair, before I proceed, hon Minister, the primary responsibility and objective of the DWS is to ensure the security of water. We need to appreciate as a country that where we are standing now, the Minister and the department, in their endeavours, are making sure every day that water security is there for South Africans. What is the challenge? The challenge is the distribution of potable water, which is

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not the responsibility of the DWS. But yes, indeed, the DWS has a responsibility to assist the water services authorities.

It is through the reforms that are taking place, particularly the Water Services Amendment Bill. The Water Services Bill, over and above the section 139 intervention, will strengthen the intervention of the Minister of the DWS to ensure that indeed the biggest challenge that the country is faced with, which is the reticulation - piping of potable water to households - gets improved. Hon Minister, we should be able to allow the dreamers to continue dreaming in their slumber; that is their work. No amount of hallucination, we must acknowledge, will deter the ANC-led GNU from fulfilling its service delivery trajectory.

Budget Vote 41 is not merely about figures in a ledger book. It is about justice, dignity and the daily lived reality of millions of South Africans. It is a Vote for the farmer in Limpopo who depends on water to produce food, for the child in Secunda who deserves clean drinking water and for the grandmother in KwaDlangezwa who deserves dignity in sanitation. When we debate Budget Vote 41, we are not

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discussing pipes and concrete alone, we are discussing the lifeblood of our democracy.

The theme, "Advancing equity and service delivery outcomes through strategic water investment", is anchored in South Africa's broader Water Transformation Agenda and aligns with continental priorities such as Africa Water Investment Program, which seeks to accelerate equitable and sustainable water infrastructure development. Within this context, it reaffirms the ANC-led GNU's commitment to dismantling the legacy of water apartheid and spatial inequality through targeted strategic investment.

During the apartheid era, we all know that water was a scarce commodity. As a result, the concept used was that it was, some for a few. But the ANC-led government has flipped it around. It said few for some in the distribution of scarce resources. What it basically means is that during the apartheid era, the scarce resource, water, was shared amongst only a few people. But what the democratic-led ANC government did was to make sure that the little scarce resource water is shared amongst the people. Therefore, the ANC-led government made sure that the infrastructure rollout reaches even the deepest rural

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areas of this country. That was intentional, but the unintentional consequence thereof is the supply of portable water to the people.

For too long, geography determined access to water. Rural communities, townships and historically disadvantaged areas were excluded for generations. That is why equity in water allocation and service delivery remain central to this budget. Water is not a privilege reserved for the few. It is a constitutional right for all South Africans.

Hon members, through the Regional Bulk Infrastructure Grant of over R2,4 billion and the Water Services Infrastructure Grant of over R17,8 billion, we are addressing severe water backlogs in rural and underserved municipalities. These allocations translate into bulk pipelines, upgraded reticulation systems and improved municipal services. In practical terms, this strengthens water delivery in districts such as Amajuba, Chris Hani, Harry Gwala, Dr Ruth Mompati and uMgungundlovu, reducing dependence on water tankers and restoring functional local systems. It ensures households are connected to a reliable municipal water supply and restores dignity through service delivery. As we say, in Phokwane, Kgalauwane and Lefakong, ...

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Sepedi:

... le gona meetse a swanetše go fihla. [... there must also be access to water.]

English:

We acknowledge challenges of weak capacity, aging infrastructure and underperformance in some municipalities. Communities are frustrated, and rightly so, but this government is responding with investment, reform and accountability.

Hon Chair, we are securing South Africa's future through a strategic infrastructure pipeline that supports long-term growth. The Lesotho Highlands Water Project Phase II remains a cornerstone of regional water security for Gauteng and the surrounding provinces. While delays and cost pressures persist, oversight is being strengthened to ensure delivery.

The uMkhomazi Water Scheme, with a projected investment of approximately R24 billion, is critical to KwaZulu-Natal's industrial and economic future. Although land disputes and community resistance require urgent resolution to safeguard timelines and costs, the Mokolo Crocodile Water Augmentation

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Project remains essential for energy, security, mine expansion and economic development in Limpopo. The Olifants Management Model programme and Berg River-Voëlsvlei Augmentation Scheme will expand bulk infrastructure, strengthening resilience across agriculture, mining, industrial and urban corridors, while supporting strategic users such as Eskom, Sasol and Exxaro. These interventions advance the ANC's developmental state agenda, where water security is economic security.

Hon members, climate change and droughts require diversification of water sources. We are investing in groundwater, water reuse, wastewater recycling and desalination to build a resilient system. At the same time, we are strengthening governance through mandatory reporting, improved oversight, and through stronger controls and monitoring. The ANC supports Budget Vote 41 because it enables accelerated water infrastructure delivery, strengthens bulk water supply systems and advances professionalism of this sector through reforms such as the National Water Resources Infrastructure Agency ... [Time expired.]. I thank you. The ANC supports.

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The DEPUTY MINISTER OF WATER AND SANITATION (Mr M D Mahlobo):
Chairperson, Comrade Minister, Pemmy Majodina, Deputy Minister
Seitlholo, other Ministers, hon members, fellow South
Africans, we wanted to say, tell no lies, claim no easy
victories, mask no difficulties. Minister Majodina has
indicated that as we celebrate the 30 years of our democracy,
we have made the necessary advancement to advance the issues
of access to water as part of a constitutional imperative to
those that were denied access to water, including the
socioeconomic benefit.

More than 90% have access to water infrastructure. However, we
are the first to admit that more needs still to be done to
ensure that the availability of water, no interminable supply
and disruption, are addressed. Equally, Minister Majodina is
leading us right now.

We are presenting this budget under very difficult conditions
of geopolitical tensions, issues of pandemic disasters, issues
of proliferation of wars, and we are pleading that we should
remain in a position. [Interjections.] Someone is disrupting
me, please, Chair. We are now ... Yes, Chair.

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The CHAIRPERSON (Ms C Labuschagne): Ms. Ishmail, will you please not put on your mic or make any comments. If you want to do a point of order, put up your hand and I will give you the opportunity.

The DEPUTY MINISTER OF WATER AND SANITATION (Mr M D Mahlobo):
As indicated by ...

The CHAIRPERSON (Ms C Labuschagne): Hon Deputy Minister, will you just take your seat a bit? Hon member, what is your point of order?

Mr S L DITHEBE: House Chair, will you kindly restore the time for hon Mahlobo for the interruption?

The CHAIRPERSON (Ms C Labuschagne): Hon member, we cannot restore the time because we cannot do it for every member. I will see at the end if it indeed interrupts his time. I will maybe allow that. Hon Deputy Minister, please continue.

The DEPUTY MINISTER OF WATER AND SANITATION (Mr M D Mahlobo):
As we are responding to the current challenges of our land, as indicated by the report of the Auditor-General, by the reports

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of drops by Minister Majodina, one of our biggest aspect is to close the investment gap that is here, deal with the issues of the deterioration of infrastructure, deal with the question of the unsafe communities and improve the issues of reliability. More important, we need to deal with the issues of building climate resilient communities, working through partnership in terms of research and development, innovation, working with a number of stakeholders including business. We want to indicate that as a country we do have the water balance. However, Minister Majodina has indicated that there are areas of deficit that are coming from Little Letaba. We know the situation in the Southern Cape and in the Eastern Cape and Northern Cape. In as much as in the last few days, we have received sufficient rain. We want to confirm the relevance of the water mix in terms of surface water. That is why Minister Majodina is unblocking a number of projects that will ensure issues of water security, working with our capability in the Trans-Caledon Tunnel Authority, TCTA. We are currently unblocking more than 30 projects, affecting more than 30 municipalities, whether it is Lesotho Highlands, Klein William, Tzaneen, Loskop, Nkomazi and a number of them. All these projects are meant to ensure that we do not have water problems.

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At the very same time, we wanted to deal with the issues of the reforms. With the reforms, it is about to respond in the current crisis. At the center is the delivery model that has worked over the last 30 years and not given us the right results.

We are proceeding in terms of ensuring that we do local business enterprises, call them utilities, where there is one line of accountability. But at the very same time, the finances are rein fence. There is proper governance. Then there is an appointment of capable individuals. There are a number of those aspects that are there. It is not a matter of politics. The assets will remain in the hands of the state, whether it is an SPV, whether it is a concession, whether it is a multi-jurisdictional kind of a delivery model to help local government.

In the meantime, we need to indicate that Minister Majodina, working with the Minister of Finance, we are paying to metros. In terms of the metro trading services, there is also an incentive scheme of more than R54 billion and a number of these municipalities are actually participating.

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Equally, Minister Majodina is looking at institutional capability on the water resource side. The National Water Resource Infrastructure Agency, with an asset base of more than R150 billion, now is going to start in earnest. The board has been appointed.

All the regulatory mechanisms are already in place. We should be able now to transfer the staff from the TCTA, from the issues of the water trading entities. The Catchment Management Agencies, CMAs, are all operational with some teething problems.

Issues of financial viability, we are looking at that. Management of water from the old irrigation board being transformed into irrigation, into water use association, such as those local users, but with an emphasis around the question of transformation. Those are some of the major issues that we are dealing with when it comes to the issues of reforms.

Equally, when it comes to reforms, we are looking at the water use licensing so that the economies of our country can be unpaired and licensing must never become a problem. From 35% to 80%, we can issue a water use license under this leadership

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of Minister Majodina in less than 90 days, and the capability is there. Equally, the skewed water allocation in the main, that is mostly with agriculture.

We are looking at the issues of using charging reference reports that we shared with the people of Limpopo during the course of the week. We shall go over from each catchment that is stressed and ensure that there is compulsory licensing. Water is shared amongst its people, but more importantly, for the environment and international obligation.

Equally, we shall proceed to transform the issues of use of water resource infrastructure. Our dams no longer actually are for only irrigation, it is for multipurpose use but the usage by communities that were displaced, but also the communities around. Therefore, there are these issues of bringing in young people, black people, women in general, to ensure that recreational activities and other activities are taken into consideration.

We need to indicate that when it comes to dams, one of the issues we wanted to deal with is the issue of licensing by those that have not registered their water uses and they have

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only 90 days to do so. You cannot do illegal damming and stealing of our water. It must fall and it must stop.

When it comes to financing of the water sector, there is traditional financing. The government under the leadership of Comrade President Cyril Ramaphosa over the next few years is making R55 billion just on issues of infrastructure grants that are given to municipalities, whether those that are with Minister Majodina, whether in Human Settlement, whether in Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs. All those projects in total, they are going to give you more than 800 projects.

Members, go to our strategic plan and read each and every municipality out of the 144. They do have a water project to address issues of problems. But then private sector has a role to play. We must allow private sector to invest in their resources. More than R40 billion in terms of private sector contribution is there, whether you go to Vaal Gamagara Magara, you go to Oliphants Management Model and we go to the market. There are also green bonds.

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Go to the City of Cape Town, working with our partnership office, we are able to go and actually mobilise resources of more than R2,5 billion because we can convert waste into particular wealth. Those are the main issues that this Ministry is doing to deal with the issues on how to do financing. Blended Finance were one of those that got more money in a number of projects, whether the issues of the Oliphants Falls, that is supporting the issues in Polokwane, eThekweni and other number of municipalities are getting those particular aspects.

Issues of water tariffs are very important. We must ensure that the tariff for water is cost-reflective, but water must never be too expensive. That is why the issue of an independent economic regulator managing issues of equity, economic development is in place.

We have finalised the pricing strategy as the response on some of the matters that we need to deal with. The issues around O&M, a certain portion of the budget now, about R24 billion around issues of rehabilitation, dealing with some of the issues that are there. The infrastructure fund now has four

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windows in which we can be in a position to support our municipalities.

Legislatively, we are then amending the Water Services Act. We are introducing water performance-based contracts. We are ensuring that nobody works in water, whether as an individual or an entity, without the requisite skills. They will have the government's arrangement to bring private sector, work with state entities, build the capacity of municipal-owned entities. Therefore, the issues that we wanted to indicate, Ramaphosa is working hard. The issues of legislation, it has to be amended.

Finally, for us to be able to deliver this work, the Minister has indicated how we are filling the position in our department. The financial turnaround with unqualified audit opinion, the issues of unauthorised irregularity has been reduced, and our budget that we request to support is R130 billion over the Medium-Term expenditure Framework, MTEF, for the main account. But more importantly, if you look at these monies, we also have our own trading entity that is R59 billion that we needed to indicate.

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The trading entity, we must deal with the issues of those who are owing the water boards and owing the department. On behalf of our government and President Cyril Ramaphosa, Minister Majodina and Seithloho, let us get down to work and stop the rhetoric. Our people expect less of us. They expect that we go on the ground and change our lives. Thank you so much, Chairperson. Thank you.

The CHAIRPERSON (Ms C Labuschagne): I just want to remind the House that when there is interference, that is not a point of order, the Table Staff automatically stop the clock, so there was no time deducted from anybody.

Debate concluded.

The mini-plenary session rose at 15:53.