

## **Accountability of Parliament to the people is hanging by a thin thread**

*By Natasha Mazzone MP – Chief Whip of the Official Opposition*

We thought that a new year would bring hope and prosperity, but a mere two days in, we had to watch as our beloved home burnt down. This was heart breaking and knowing that things would never be the same again was almost too much to fathom.

While Zoom offers a solution, it remains a huge problem for democracy to be in full action when we cannot all be seated together, especially with so many MPs scattered in far-flung areas. While the resilience of the South African heart prevailed, there remain many loopholes to holding the Executive to account – the dreaded mute button that takes away our right to speak on issues that need to be fleshed out.

Parliament is not in a good way, and I am not referring only to the buildings. We have staff with no offices and general chaos regarding sittings and venues to do our work, all while institutional knowledge was lost for life.

Accountability of Parliament to the people is hanging by a thin thread.

The more questions we submit, the less answers we receive. Insistence that the Executive appear before us, devolve into Zoom conversations with who knows who assisting the relevant Minister with answers.

This year we have only had one session with each cluster and we are already at the end of the second term.

This is not accountability; this is running from a problem that will simply grow and lead to more distrust and concern from members and the South African Public at large.

We need to become resilient enough to accept that snap debates from the floor are international best practice for a reason and we should not have to depend on one weekly meeting where we grovel for debates of national importance.

The opposition shouldn't be forced to wait with baited breath for the answers to be given. Parliament must urgently address these issues.

We still lack basic services required to execute our jobs correctly. Too few researchers are allocated to committees and most of the information are given to the ANC study groups while the opposition remains an afterthought.

I must take this opportunity, however, to thank the NA table staff for always being at hand to assist with issues spearheaded by Mr Xaso and his professional, independent and knowledgeable team. This is a great service to us, and one that we don't take lightly. We hereby extend our greatest thanks.

We are still lagging far behind many other countries when it comes to the updating and processing of legislation. Parliament is the legislative arm of government, but still, so few pieces of legislation are completed and above all Private Members Bills are ignored if they do not have an ANC name on it, and that cannot be denied.

We have to accept, we are in a bad way: acting secretaries, confusions over contracts, calling in of leaders of parties to the Speaker, generic contracts being sent out. This parliament is not a well-oiled machine.

It would also be remiss of me not to mention the danger we are putting our members in when oversight tours are undertaken. We have accidents; one has been fatal. The vehicles drive too fast because they are instructed to move at high speed because programs are not timed properly. Here members must take responsibility for tardiness and treating these oversight trips as jolling junkets.

Parliament should be dedicated to making the life of all South Africans a better place. It is failing in making this a reality.

Parliament should be back in its full capacity; the new venue must start being finalized as soon as possible and the Good Hope chamber should be filled. We must lead by example. Let us never forget that.

To be in Parliament is an honour. It is time to regain the honour of Parliament and make South Africa proud of its national stage.