

A Just Energy Transition must not become another phrase

By Cheryl Phillips, DA Shadow Deputy Minister of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment

Chair,

A Just Energy Transition (JET) is a phrase that has become the “4th IR” phrase of 2019. Will the results be as dismal or will the ANC government finally do the right thing for our country, our people and our future?

Some of our people who are at the lower end of the economic band, are people who live closest to the coal fired power stations. These are the people whose quality of life will be improved by a transition to green energy. Weaning our country off coal powered energy will not happen overnight – there is plenty of time for coal miners to be gradually retrained in the renewable energy sector, especially considering our energy minister’s penchant for procrastination.

A funded transition to green energy is a golden opportunity for our people and our country – if only we can grab the opportunity with both hands and pass it on to those who are affected by loadshedding, pollution and job losses. We cannot allow the greedy fat cats and tenderpreneurs to get their hands on the money, as we saw happening with Covid relief funds.

Job losses are already a reality, not due to the transition to green energy but due to loadshedding, aging infrastructure and a government that chooses to procrastinate while our country literally burns, due to climate change. Our wildfires have not ranged as far, burnt as long or as hot as they do now. Less than a month ago, we experienced devastating wild fires in the North West Province. Brave South African lost their lives, animals died in excruciating pain, their twisted and charred remains photographed and the images shared on social media.

Flooding, just like fire, has ravaged not only our country but many countries around the world. Global warming? Yes! Say the majority – no! Say some - just a theory. My question to South Africans and the world is: Are you willing to bet the future of your grandchildren and great grandchildren on your opinion when there is a better alternative – Is the alternative perfect, by no means. Our world will however continue to die if we don’t change and that change begins with you.

I challenge anyone who is in favour of maintaining the status quo of dirty energy to live in the coal belt for 12 months – better yet, move in with a family who have lived there for years. Point to a residential area on the map, choose a house and the chances are one in 4 that you will end up living with a family who has a member suffering from chronic asthma. Listening to a person with asthma is almost as traumatizing for the listener as for the person with asthma. Each breath they take, is a struggle – you find yourself trying to breathe for them. This is not some “unseen” effect on the environment that MIGHT affect your grandchildren as many will have us believe. This is the daily reality for at least 113 000 residents living near coal fired power stations. If we do not change, we will continue spending billions of rand

annually - which our country can ill afford, on healthcare for people affected by dirty power generation.

The European Commission President recently said at COP 27 “Let us not take the polluting highway to hell but earn our clean ticket to heaven”. Colleagues, South Africans, let’s get off the polluting highway to hell and leave a legacy that our grandchildren and their children can be proud of.