

Ad hoc committee will ensure success of Electricity Minister

Speech by Samantha Graham-Maré MP, DA Shadow Minister of Electricity

Chairperson,

I don't need to tell you about load-shedding and how it impacts our lives. I don't need to illustrate how according to reports, 66% of township businesses have had to cut jobs due to loadshedding with more than 60% of these same businesses being unable to operate at all when power outages hit.

The SA Reserve Bank has indicated that Stage 3 to Stage 6 power cuts are negatively impacting the economy by between R204 and R899 million per day, respectively.

Large retailers like Shoprite are spending an additional R93 million per month on diesel in order to continue trading during load-shedding. It is inevitable that these costs will be passed onto the already overburdened and cash-strapped consumers.

And what about health care facilities where it is alleged that healthcare workers are being forced to choose which patients to help because loadshedding makes it impossible to help everyone? Where vaccines are being stored in cooler boxes and generators are either failing or can only run certain pieces of equipment, leaving patients waiting hours for medical attention.

I don't have to remind you, Chairperson, of the children trying to study for exams across the country, knowing that their only way out of poverty is through education, but being forced to lose precious learning time to hours of darkness.

We don't need to hear another litany of sob stories about how our people are going days and weeks without water in rural areas because 12 hours a day of power in 3 or 4 hour increments are not enough to fill reservoirs.

We all know these stories. This is our lived reality. This is South Africa after 29 years of ANC governance.

Towards the middle of last year, loadshedding hit unprecedented levels. President Ramaphosa, in a rare public appearance, addressed the nation on the severity of the crisis. So shocked was he that he skipped task team level and went directly to the establishment of a committee. Cue the National Energy Crisis Committee or NECOM. The mandate of NECOM, according to the Energy Action Plan, drafted in August of 2022, is to do "whatever it takes to achieve energy security". The document goes further to state that "By applying laser focus to a limited number of high-impact interventions, and by acting with urgency and decisiveness, we can end load shedding."

Sounds promising. In January of this year, 6 months after its establishment, NECOM assured us that the Committee was on track to address loadshedding and the energy crisis. While I don't want to state the obvious here, it is worth noting that there have been only two days **without** load-shedding this entire year so far, with 91 days having had between Stage 4 and Stage 6 blackouts. By way of comparison, before the establishment of NECOM, we experienced only 28 days of loadshedding in total over the same period in 2022. You can draw your own conclusions.

Rather than admit that the major contributing factors to the energy crisis are *inter alia* corruption, cadre deployment and mismanagement, President Ramaphosa did what any self-respecting billionaire President would do – he threw money at the problem. Around R30-odd million a year's worth of taxpayer's money in the guise of a Minister of Electricity.

In his statement on the appointment of Minister Ramokgopa in March, the President outlined his vision of the role that the Minister of Electricity would play in resolving the electricity crisis. First and foremost, the new Minister has been tasked with reducing both the severity and frequency of load-shedding as a matter of urgency. Just short of two months into his tenure, I can say with absolute assurance that he has accomplished neither. Instead, his appointment has been characterized by political in-fighting, a complete lack of coherence with respect to his role, functions and authority and a whole lot of posturing while power outages continue unabated.

Tasked by President Ramaphosa with the “political responsibility, authority and control” over the Energy Action Plan, Minister Ramokgopa has a daunting task. But this should not give rise to a lone wolf Minister, unencumbered by any oversight or accountability mechanism, operating outside the bounds of Parliamentary or Constitutional constraints. Instead, given the very serious and urgent nature of his responsibilities, it is imperative that the Minister of Electricity be required to report to an ad hoc committee established by this House.

In this way, Parliament can ensure that finding solutions to the energy crisis is done in a transparent, accountable manner and that the proper checks and balances are in place. This ad hoc committee would serve for the duration of the tenure of the Minister of Electricity, who will serve until such time as the energy crisis has been averted. The mandate of the committee, as agreed to by this House, would assist in consolidating the expected outcomes of the Minister's position by providing the parameters within which the Committee would provide oversight and evaluation. Given that we are still waiting for clarity on the actual role of the Minister, the ad hoc committee would be an invaluable part of transparency, oversight and finding solutions to the energy crisis.

Furthermore, the interests of all South Africans would be represented through the Members of Parliament who serve on the ad hoc committee. Every person in this country has a vested interest in the success of the Minister. It is our duty as Parliament to ensure that the Minister achieves his mandate honestly and transparently and not through further erosion of our democratic principles because the ANC are more concerned with protecting those intent on destroying our country than solving the crisis. Or because public representatives are too lazy to do the work they were elected to do. Let's do our duty and establish this ad hoc committee. Let us be part of the solution to the energy crisis and not be the enablers of those hell-bent on keeping us in the dark.

We request that this motion be supported.