

Budget Debate on Vote 35: Higher Education, Science and Innovation

Speech Sibongiseni Ngcobo MP

DA Member on the Portfolio Committee of Higher Education, Science and Innovation

Thank you, House Chairperson,

The Department of Science and Innovation's mandate is to boost socio-economic development in South Africa through research and innovation by providing leadership, an enabling environment and resources for science, technology and innovation. This is an extremely important function. If we are to enhance the well-being of South Africans, we need ground-breaking science and innovation.

But sadly, the ANC-led government has lost billions of rand in corruption over the years, leaving such important departments as the Department of Science and Innovation seriously underfunded. While cadres have been enriching themselves, their families and friends, critical departments like science and innovation have been neglected.

The DA has recently discovered that, over a period of just two years, the ANC-led government spent R93 million maintaining 97 mansions for Ministers and their deputies.

The Department of Science and Innovation could have used the R93 million rand to increase its allocation to various institutions for health innovation research from R55.2 million to R148 million or it could have spent the money on increasing its allocation to various institutions for hydrogen innovation research from R43.8 million to R136 million.

We commend the initiative by the South African Council for Natural Scientific Professions to track the unemployment of natural science graduates in an effort to gain insight into areas where the State can intervene. We will be monitoring this initiative closely.

House chairperson,

Government needs to start seeing science and innovation as the key enabler of service delivery. It is undeniable that advancing technologies and innovations will result in improved education, healthcare and even public service.

Minister, you need to ensure that entities like the National Research Foundation are properly funded. You must come up with a plan to provide the funding required by the National Research Foundation in order to fund all qualifying bursary and research grant applications respectively, and the R575 million required by the Technology Innovation Agency to support technology development and commercialisation.

Minister, you must not just talk. You must act. You need to show your commitment to advancing science and innovation in this country and you can only demonstrate this commitment by making sure that the Department of Science and Innovation is properly

funded. There is no doubt that, with enough funding, this Department can go a long way in addressing a number of challenges facing our country. The DA-led Moonshot Pact government next year will ensure that departments like Science and Innovation have enough budget to carry out their mandate.

This is what our country needs.

This is what will take our country forward.

I thank you