

Winds of Change as MEC Ravi Pillay addresses the Provincial Legislature of his first Vote 14 Budget Speech writes Vusi Shabalala

It was Friday the 8th of June 2012 as MEC Ravi Pillay entered the KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Legislature to present his first ever Vote 14 Budget Speech since being sworn in as MEC for Human Settlements and Public Works on XXXX. You could have seen with the number of guests who flogged their way into the gallery that Mr Pillay seem to be a centre figure amongst the politicians of the Province.

In his opening remarks, the first of its kind, MEC Pillay emphasised that “One of the major thrusts of the present administration led by President Jacob Zuma is the pursuit of infrastructure development which in turn would be a catalyst for economic growth and job creation. It is a visionary programme inspired by leadership committed to genuine and sustainable solutions for the future of the country. The outcomes approach which characterises the present administration demands that we critically locate ourselves as Public Works within the new service delivery model.” This is a pathway to greater responsibilities for Mr Pillay and his Department. It is quite indicative that he has indeed a mammoth task ahead in achieving amongst other the following goal paths:

- Ensuring that Public Works take a lead in driving the economy of the Province in job creation and work opportunities;

- Continue on the wave and momentum of Public Works to roll back the frontiers of poverty through programmes such as Izandla Ziyagezana; The KZN Integrated Greening Programme; Property Incubator Programme; National Youth Service; The Extended Public Works Programme and the Internship Programme, that create sustainable jobs and work opportunities while simultaneously upskilling the beneficiaries, particularly young people;

Notwithstanding the fact that infrastructure remains the key challenge and inadequate to meet the social and economic needs of the people. Equally so, it has been noted that the Department of Public Works has made its mark when one zooms into the positive pocket of progress or achievement with the rate at which the Extended Public Works Programme (EPWP) reaches the skies with remarkable statistics achieved thus far. This is by far attested by MEC Pillay who confidently announced the figures with ease that “It is worth noting that a sizeable number of these jobs were created in KwaZulu-Natal. For the 2011-2012 financial year, the Department had an internal target of 28 000 work opportunities. Between April 2011 and March 2012 a total of 137 207 work opportunities were created. This was a remarkable achievement.” It should also be acknowledged that notwithstanding

such great strides, there is still room for doing more in setting interventions for challenges that keep on emerging. The reality which the MEC remarked boldly on was the steadily reduction percentage of the Provincial capital expenditure programme which showed a grey area for the past decade and reason being a trend in client Departments increasingly choosing implementing agents rather than Public Works. However, from Mr Pillay's point of understanding, there is an imminent change which is to come. "We boldly say that we have accepted this challenge to reclaim our position as the implementing agent of choice for all sector Departments." He emphasised with confidence. This statement is coupled with the call by Mr Pillay and his Department to reclaim Public Works' position as "an implementing agent of choice for all sector Departments". It was far-fetched for a layman to understand these remarks but an answer to this was the announcement of the "capacitation plan". This plan is according Mr Pillay aimed at generating a capacitation framework that is aligned to the Infrastructure Delivery Management System (IDMS). The framework intends to establish sustainable institutional capacity within the Provincial Government to support effective and efficient infrastructure planning and delivery. It is quite interesting to note that given an increased capacitation budget for improving infrastructure support and the strategic focus of government to shift the composition of expenditure towards investment in infrastructure, the MEC and Public Works together with other partner Departments in the Province would seek or foster to prioritize establishing the organizational capacity required to support infrastructure delivery. One therefore see beyond the horizon where Public Works will work towards boosting its capacity by employing a full complement of engineers, quantity surveyors, architects and technicians as was alluded by the Premier in his State of the Province Address earlier this year.

Added to the pockets of excellence is the Public Works Internship Programme which has secured 27 newly-graduated engineers,

architects, project managers and quantity surveyors thus far. Therefore the Capacitation Plan would made provisions of increasing capacity within the Department and the view is that some of the training and exposure required by interns could be provided within the Department by way of deployment to appropriate infrastructure programmes throughout the KwaZulu-Natal Province.



Members of the Executive for Public Works at a briefing during the budget speech. Ms Sindi Linda, GM Property Management & Mr Jeremy Redfearn, Chief Financial Officer

Fraud, corruption and maladministration is a venom of the day in most institutions, big organisations and even governments around the world. However, this has been an element that the Department of Public Works possess the vim and verve to dealing with it. The Department of Public Works commenced a determined investigation into the awarding of contracts. This resulted in a special focus on one contractor, amid persistent allegations of Fraud and Corruption, including Cover Quoting and Fronting. On 30 August 2011, the contractor was arrested and charged with 148 counts of Fraud and Corruption to the value of R 123 000 000. As a result of various investigations, four Department of Public Works officials were arrested on 4 November 2011. Payments have been identified to a further three Public Works officials as well as four other officials from other Government Departments. These 11 officials are still under investigation. Possible criminal and/or disciplinary charges are being investigated against a further 15 Department of Public Works officials. The Special Investigations Unit (SIU) is involved in this case.

A very touching moment was when he expressed his heartfelt appreciation of the

work done by his predecessor, former MEC Maggie Govender and stressed that “I have emphasized these matters in considerable detail to demonstrate the Department’s commitment to rooting out corruption among both the contractors and Departmental staff. I also wish at this point to pay special tribute to my predecessor, 12

the Honourable M. Govender (MPL) for her principled commitment to this priority of our government.”

MEC Pillay had an opportunity to address the media as some reporters were very keen on him unpacking the speech for further understanding. It was also interesting to note the support the MEC was proffered by his executive leadership, management and staff of both Departments (Human Settlements and Public Works) during the entire proceedings of the day.



MEC Pillay addressing the media with Mr R Govender, the Head of Department for Public Works on the left

The other interesting part was the presence of the graduates who are part of the Department of Public Works’ Bursary and Internship Programme who were also in attendance and packed at the gallery.

In conclusion, MEC Pillay remained committed to the course as he acknowledged that “the path we tread remains a trying one, I am confident that we are making significant strides in service delivery and creating a better life for all our people.” This statement is in support of the Minister of Public Works, Mr Thulas Nxesi, who said a month ago that “the National Department was at a crossroads and that a

broad turnaround strategy was being implemented. The picture in the Province is more optimistic. This has been acknowledged by both SCOPA and the Finance Committee” reiterated MEC Pillay. Outcomes are still yet to be seen as the road ahead is full of landmines but there is hope for success. Is anyone out there Listening?



MEC Ravi Pillay unpacking the policy speech during the press briefing