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MINI PLENARY - NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

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VOTE NO 17 - HIGHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING

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PROCEEDINGS OF MINI PLENARY SESSION OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

Members of the mini plenary session met at Committee Room M46 at 10:01.

The House Chairperson, Ms Z Majozi, took the Chair and requested members to observe a moment of silence for prayer or meditation.

The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Ms Z Majozi): Let us congratulate Orlando Pirates for winning the league. Amabhakaniya! [Buccaneers]. I also like to congratulate Amasandawana [Sundowns] for taking it in Africa.

I will now recognise the hon Minister of Higher Education and Training.

APPROPRIATION BILL

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Debate on Vote No 17 - Higher Education:

The MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING: House
Chairperson, Deputy Ministers, Dr Nomusa Dube-Ngube and Dr
Mimmy Gondwe, hon chairperson of the portfolio committee, hon
Tebogo Letsie and members of the portfolio committee, our
Director-General, Dr Sishi and the senior management of the
department, chairpersons of the Quality Councils, chief
chairpersons and chief executive officers, CEOs, of the Sector
Education and Training Authority, Seta, vice-chancellors,
principals of Technical and Vocational Education and Training,
TVET, and Community Education and Training, CET, colleges, CEO
of the public entities, leaders of organised labour and
organised business, leaders of the SA Union of Students, SAUS,
SA Technical Vocational Education and Training Student
Association, SATVETSA, and student representatives from across
campuses, distinguished guests, fellow South Africans, and the
young women and men of our country, good morning.

I rise to table Budget Vote 17, my first as Minister of the
Department of Higher Education and Training. We stand on the
eve of Youth Month, 50 years from the morning of 16 June 1976,
when the children of Soweto walked out of their classrooms and

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changed the course of our history. They marched, they fell and they bequeathed a country to us in which the right to learn is no longer up for debate, but the inheritance is incomplete.

The youth of 1976 fought for the right to learn; the youth of 2026 demands much more. They demand the right to learn, to skill, to innovate, to work, but also participate meaningfully in the economy of their own country. This Budget Vote seeks to answer some of those demands.

This budget is tabled within the Government of National Unity, anchored in three commitments: inclusive growth and job creation, the fight against poverty and inequality, and the building of a capable ethical and developmental state. Through the Medium-Term Development Plan, this portfolio carries direct responsibility for some of the most consequential outcomes of this programme. The state of the nation address, Sona, was unambiguous - a fundamental overhaul of the skill system, a dual training model that links classroom learning to workplace experience and the strengthening of our TVET colleges as the home of occupational training. This Vote gives effect to that mandate.

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The post-school system we now lead was not built overnight and not by any of us. It is the work of three decades of democratic policy, of Ministers and officials who came before us, of councils and quality bodies, vice chancellors, principals, lecturers, learners and of millions of South Africans who placed their hopes in education when they had little else.

The 2013 White Paper for Post-School Education and Training, PSET, set this sector on its current footing. The National Student Financial Aid Scheme, NSFAS, the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations, QCTO, the Council on Higher Education, SA Qualifications Authority, SAQA, the consolidation of Further Education and Training, FET, into TVET, the establishment of CET as a sector in its own right - these are the architecture of our democratic project.

I want to acknowledge those who hold up this system every day, the lecturers who teach in conditions that would defeat most professions, the principals and vice chancellors who manage institutions of growing complexity, administrators and registrars, and the workers without whom no campus, college or community learning centre would open its gate.

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What this Vote proposes, therefore, is not rapture. It is the next phase of a project that has been underway for 30 years. We stand on the shoulders of those who came before us. We owe them and ourselves the discipline of doing the work that remains.

What are the challenges? The big challenge that this budget seeks to resolve is to ensure that learning is connected to earning, and that every rand and cent that is spent in the skills sector is intended towards and ends up in the hands of the students, workers and youth of our country. That connection of ensuring that education and training leads to work, which should be reduced by this Budget Vote into practicality, an announcement that the President made in his Sona.

What are those key challenges? Too many young people complete qualifications, some of them without transitioning into work. Too many employers report skills shortages while graduates remain unemployed. The path to self-employment is hobbled by weak entrepreneurial education. Our system also remains under scaled.

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TVET produced mid-level technical and vocational skills, and we need to improve this. We also need some interventions as it relates to second-chance opportunities that reconnect young people and adults to learning. Both must grow and improve, and this budget is simply also about that.

Our Setas receive billions of rand and skills levies, and their translation into employment needs to also improve. They must determine workplace and sector skills, and ensure those needs inform industry-relevant curricula. Gone should be the days when training providers, private or public, determine the skills that are required. It must be the industry, government and everyone who is actively involved in our economy, who determines what training should happen. I think this attitude will also guide our interventions in the current infancy as it relates to Legacy Project.

At the same time, Setas have played a positive role, and we need to approach its reform with much more rigour, so that the pronouncement made by the President at the Sona is also given reality on the effectiveness of these institutions.

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The NSFAS has expanded access to higher education on a scale unmatched on this continent, but its sustainability and governance must be put on a sound footing. The school system is not only the place where issues of training around artificial intelligence and so on, and so forth, should reside. Our institutions within the PSET sectors should also include this. The Skills Revolution initiative is not a project of this department alone; it is a project of our economy and government as a whole.

This Budget Vote 17 is allocated R149,2 billion for 2026-27. Over the Medium-Term Expenditure Framework, the department will administer R468 billion. Transfers and subsidies account for 90,4% of the Vote, R134,9 billion. This is structurally a transfer budget, and the question of how those transfers translate into outcomes is the central question of our time.

University education, yes, receives about R100,1 billion, 82,4% of the programme budget. TVET receives R14,7 billion, a 6,3% increase reflecting our prioritisation. CETs receive R3,3 billion - a figure that names rather than disguises the structural underfunding of community education. The NSFAS grows to R54,6 billion by 2028-29 and the Skills Development

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Levy, SDL, is projected at R27,7 billion in 2026-27, rising to R31,1 billion by 2028-29.

The public is not interested in the size of the numbers. The public is interested in what these numbers do. This must therefore become more than a budget of transfers. It must become a budget of transformation, co-ordination, skills, accountability and outcomes.

I will name a few of our priorities, the first one being digital transformation, which is not just a technology programme; it is the backbone of a modern PSET system. We will rebuild the integrity of our data system, beginning with the TVET Management Information System rebuild. We'll also expand the National Open Learning System. We'll introduce online TVET and CET offerings so that learning is no longer a question of how far a young person must travel, but what they wish to study.

We'll roll out digital career services that meet young people where they already are, on their phones, in their pockets, in their townships and in their villages. We will build curricula and partnerships in artificial intelligence, data software

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analytics and cybersecurity. A digitally transformed PSET system must know where learners are, what they study, whether they complete, whether they transition into work and which sectors are absorbing them.

Our second priority is the Skills Revolution initiative. This, as I said, is not just an adjustment. It is a reordering, a break with what has not worked, and a commitment to what must. The Skills Revolution rests on five pillars, which is occupational qualifications recognised by industry; workplace-integrated learning so that no young South African qualifies without first having stood in a workplace; apprenticeships and artisan development, and the "lost middle" of our economy; regional industries skills compacts, binding municipalities, employers, colleges and Setas to a regional skills plan; and employer participation, not as an audience but as producers of the skills that the economy requires.

The third priority is the size and shape of the system. How many university places do we need, and what for? What kind of universities does South Africa require? What should TVETs become and how large must it grow? How should CETs serve our communities? The National Development Plan target remains

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ambitious and some of them they remain unmet, but a lot of ground has been covered in ensuring that we expand this system.

TVET enrolment is, of course, below what it should be. This is where we will be directing our resources. Importantly, what this project speaks to is the long-term expansion and vision of where the PSET system should be. We should not act startled only when the numbers at Grade 12 grow, we need to start the plan now. So, the size and shape project within the DHET will have to look at where do we want to see the PSET system in a few years to come. This work will also be done in earnest in ensuring that the system organises itself in such a way that it will meet this demand.

The young people of South Africa are not the beneficiaries at the end of the system. They are the reason for the system. Every rand of this Vote must be judged against a single question. Does it expand the opportunities of the young? We will expand Khetha career services, deepen "skills on wheels", so that career guidance reaches the villages, townships and the small towns too long bypassed by every other arm of the state. We'll strengthen workplace readiness, student support,

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mental health services, safety on our campuses, gender-based violence prevention, disability inclusion and student entrepreneurship.

The test of this budget is not whether the department spends. The test is whether a young person in Mitchells Plain, Giyani, Rustenberg, Lusikisiki, Kuruman, Mdantsane or Soweto can walk a pathway from learning to livelihood. That, for us, is the only test. Our Skills Revolution can also be built with weak governance. So, part of the intention of this budget will be to ensure that we strengthen governance. We will, of course, defend institutional autonomy but we will not confuse autonomy with impunity. The public pays for this system and is entitled to know how the money is spent and what outcomes it produces.

We believe that the Skills Revolution will not be delivered, as I said, by government alone. Businesses must also provide placements, apprenticeships, curriculum input and yesterday's engagement with businesses ...

The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Ms Z Majozi): Hon Minister, can you take a seat please. There's a hand.

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Mr J A MNGXITAMA: Chair, I just want to check if the Minister will take a question as to whether he will support ...

The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Ms Z Majozi): No, don't ask the question. You must request first.

The hon Minister, are you able ...

The MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING: No.

The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Ms Z Majozi): Okay, thank you. Can we then continue. [Interjections.]

The MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING: [Laughter.].

The Skills Revolution will not be delivered by government alone. Businesses must also provide placements, apprenticeships and curriculum input. [Inaudible.] ... yesterday with business leaders indicates that ...

The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Ms Z Majozi): Hon Minister, can you please hold again. Hon Reddy?

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Mr V G REDDY: Hon Speaker, I am really shocked at the Minister laughing at an important question that was posed by the hon Mngxitama. Does he think that this is a joke?

The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Ms Z Majozi): Hon Reddy, hon Reddy, there was no question taken. Please, you are disturbing the proceeding ...

Mr V G REDDY: I am sorry, I did not want to disturb ...

The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Ms Z Majozi): That is not a point of order. Please switch off.

Mr V G REDDY: He should not be laughing on a serious issue like this. Thank you.

The MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING: As I was saying, our engagement with business leaders yesterday indicates that there is goodwill to harness in the private sector.

Labour must help shape decent work and the upskilling of those already in it. Universities must deepen research and

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innovation. TVETs must become the recognised home of occupational excellence. CETs must become the community platform for life-long learning. Setas and the NSFAS skills fund must become catalytic outcomes-driven instruments and government, across departments and spheres, must align industrial, economic and skills strategies so that we train for the economy and the economy would be ready to absorb. This is the compact this Vote begins on.

This Budget Vote, I present it with full appreciation of the scale of the task before us. We inherit a system of great achievement but also of great challenges. It has opened doors for millions and built bridges to work for many. It has chartered ways in innovation and economic participation. That system was built by the hands that came before ours. It is entrusted upon us to ensure that we take it forward so that it benefits each and every young person and citizen in our country. Today, this Vote begins the work of ensuring that we learn and setting us free. Thank you very much for listening.

Mr W T LETSIE: House Chair, Minister and Deputy Ministers, director-general, members of the portfolio committee and

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everybody else at home. Maybe let's start by congratulating the big institution, Orlando Pirates, for winning a treble.

Secondly, we indicate that the ANC firmly supports the adoption of this budget. We remain unequivocal that education and skill development are not privileges for the few, but constitutional rights and instruments of social and economic justice for the majority of South Africans. Despite fiscal constraints, as the Minister has just alluded, and slow economic growth, the ANC-led government has allocated R149,2 billion to the Post-School Education and Training institution, PSET, system.

Of this, R121,6 billion comes from voted funds across six departmental programmes, while R27,7 billion is drawn from direct charges against the National Revenue Fund to support Sector Education and Training Authority, SETAs, and the National Skills Fund. Baseline reductions across the Medium-Term Expenditure Framework, MTEF, period are worrying. This year, R715,6 million in reduction.

Next year, R1,5 billion in reduction and R3,8 billion in 2028-29 financial year. This poses a risk to institutional

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stability, infrastructure roll-out and student support. We reject the notion that reduced investment in education can ever be a sustainable path for national development.

Education remains a strategic investment in growth, state capability and social cohesion. Our oversight visit revealed serious infrastructure challenges at the University of Venda and Walter Sisulu University. Students are faced with overcrowded lecture halls.

At the University of Zululand, residents are in such poor conditions that they had to be decommissioned. Indeed, even Walter Sisulu University has already decommissioned about 600 beds due to inhabitable conditions. Minister, the only solution here remains departmental guided policies, procedures and practices, PPPs.

We have already given the green light to Walter Sisulu University on this. Please, do so with the University of Zululand and all others, including University of Mpumalanga, who desperately need such interventions to create access to poor students. The ANC-led government continues to prioritise bursaries and loans for students from the poor and the

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working-class families, earning below R350 000 yearly, as well as the missing middle students.

In the 2026-27, the National Student Financial Aid Scheme, NSFAS, has allocated R50,5 billion for bursaries, and R361 millions of that is for administration. The NSFAS this year funds 749 537 students - I almost said, listen carefully, 483 474 of those are at universities and 266 000 are at the Technical and Vocational Education and Training, TVET, colleges. Many of these students are the first in their families to access higher education.

This is a transformative milestone. We are indeed concerned that the NSFAS is growing faster than university subsidies. Expanding access, Minister, in line with the President's state of the nation address pronouncement is great. However, this must be balanced with adequate institutional support to maintain quality education and to retain skilled academics.

We also note governance instabilities at the NSFAS, which returned to administration just over a year after exiting it. Delays in accommodation payment undermine student dignity and institutional stability. We reject calls by the DA and anyone

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else associated with them to disestablish the NSFAS and transfer funds to universities, and this is why. This view is anti-intellectual and is not supported by any scientific-led evidence.

Mismanagement of funds at these institutions has already necessitated the Special Investigating Unit, SIU, investigations and recoveries worth over R2 billion from the same institutions have already been done. The growing student debt is alarming. Universities charging accommodation fees above the cap leave students indebted, unable to register or barred from receiving certificates upon graduation. This undermines their ability to compete for jobs.

A sustainable solution must be found that protects both students and institutions. Indeed, we've seen some political parties saying that they are bringing a Bill. We're waiting for it and will scrutinise it as much as possible. As the ANC, by the way, we have already proposed a workable solution, not a solution that will not stand the test of time. This workable solution will protect both the universities and students alike.

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Tomorrow in the committee, we will present these solutions to Universities South Africa, USAf; to the SA Public Colleges Organisation, SAPCO; to the SA Union of Students, SAUS, to the Safety and Security Sector Education and Training Authority, SASSETA, with a view of agreeing on a practicable solution when the committee meets tomorrow.

You'll see these ones of universities, they will reject some populist proposal and agree with ours because ours is very practicable. Skills levy funds will support skilling, reskilling and upskilling of the workers to meet industry needs. The Sector Education and Training Authority, SETAs, and NSFAS must expand access to work integrated learning internships and occupational qualifications, ensuring alignment with Quality Council for Trades and Occupations, QCTO, framework.

We welcome bold initiatives such as establishing veterinary schools at the University of Fort Hare and the University of Free State, reducing reliance on important schools, constructions on Bambanani, Mitchells Plain and Greentown TVET campuses, community learning centres and city college central offices in the Eastern Cape, Northern Cape and Gauteng. We

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caution institutions to ensure solid contracts with contractors to avoid abandoned project or structural defect.

This institution must blacklist all these companies that abandon infrastructure projects in the middle of those projects. Access alone is not enough. The PSET sector must improve throughput, student success, academic success and graduate employability. Transformation must include racial equity, disability inclusion and empowerment of historically disadvantaged communities. Expanding quality post-school education, Minister, is central to defeating poverty, to reducing inequality and to ending unemployment. The ANC remains committed to transformation, inclusivity and equity in higher education.

When we support this budget, we don't support it blindly. We support understanding that we have challenges in the system, but we also support it because we know it will touch the people that has put us here, the poorest of the poor. Anybody else who does not support this budget simply says that the more than 750 000 students that the system is supporting must go home and must have debt.

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Therefore, we call upon those people that when we register to vote in a few weeks' time, they must do so in their majority so that they can respond perfectly to those who will reject this budget that is pro-poor and that speaks to the livelihoods of our people. Thank you very much. The ANC supports this.

IsiZulu:

Mnu M P MSEZANE: Angibonge Sihlalo ngaphambili, angiqale ngibingelele abafundi baseNingizimu Afrika ikakhulukazi abafundi abahlwempu, abafundi abazalwa isigaba sabasebenzi, izingane zothisha, zamanesi, zamphoyisa.

English:

Minister, these are students that you and your department refer to as the missing middle students.

IsiZulu:

Abazali babo bahola kancane abakwazi ukukhokhela imfundo. Yikho befuna imfundo yamahhala.

English:

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Let me also take this opportunity to wish students that are currently writing their examinations all the best. May you achieve results that are beyond your expectations. Budget Vote 17 on Higher Education and Training ...

IsiZulu:

... ithule du Ngqongqoshe ngemfundo yamahhala. SiwuMkhonto weSizwe ...

English:

... we are clear as outlined in our people's mandate that a poor child and a child of a working-class cannot afford to pay for education and training. Whereas with the growing unemployment and the rising cost of living that is attributed to the Government of National Unity, GNU, marriage of convenience. Therefore ...

Isizulu:

... njengoMkhonto weSizwe Party ...

English:

... we vehemently reject Budget Vote 17. Historical debt has left many young people jobless because of withheld

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certificates. This budget says nothing about ensuring that these previously deserving graduates whom others have waited for years to be able to seek employment and change the poor backgrounds of their families.

In 2013 to 2015, 2015 to 2017, historical debt was settled during the time of President Jacob Zuma's tenure. The National Student Financial Aid Scheme, NSFAS, was further converted to a grant from being a loan that it is now. This exercise was done with an understanding that young people must not be indebted before they even get employment.

In 2017, President Zuma further declared free education for the poor and the working class. And after he left office, this was reversed by Mr Ramaphosa.

IsiZulu:

Angiphinde futhi njengoMkhonto weSizwe ...

English:

... we will never support a budget that does not address the issue of free education for the poor and the working-class students of South Africa. We will never sell out a black child

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that is deprived of access to the pro-school education and training. Let us then address the instability that is caused by the Minister of Higher Education and Training, Buti Manamela at NSFAS.

Whilst we advocate for free, decolonised, Afrocentric education for the poor and the working class, NSFAS remains a critical entity that has funded millions of poor black students and still funds millions today. Over the past 12 months, NSFAS has become more stable and more effective. Applications that closed on the 15th of November were finalised by the 15th of December 2025, giving students clarity of their funding before they even went to Christmas period. Most appeals were resolved on time, and funds were released early to universities and Technical and Vocational Education and Training, TVET colleges.

For the first time, in nearly 10 years, there was no NSFAS related strike for from the beginning of the academic year to the close of registration meaning that NSFAS was able to perform its core mandate. This significant achievement shows that NSFAS can fulfil its mandate, but NSFAS has also made it very clear that its budget can only support a fraction of the

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poor students of this country. This is why our call for free education remains firm and non-negotiable.

However, we were astounded to learn through the media on the 4th of May that the Minister has put the entity under administration regardless of the great progress that I've mentioned already. It is alleged that he did so through full control over the scheme and also handpicked a comrade to run the entity and have absolute functions that should be performed by the board and the powers that should be exercised by the chief executive officer, CEO.

There are further damning allegations of political interference where the Minister saw that he could not persuade the board to recommend a preferred candidate for CEO, he allegedly resorted to placing the entity under administration.

The very lame reasons he stated to qualify his decisions are exactly that, lame and baseless. According to the National Student Financial Aid Scheme Act, all the reasons he gave don't meet the criteria which can only mean that the damning allegations are true. I can see that the GNU partners are howling then.

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The Minister did not surprise us though as it seems to be his modus operandi. He has put five entities under administration in less than a year as a Minister, three Setas, Sector and Education Training Authorities, one TVET college, the College of Cape Town, and now NSFAS. Amazingly out of the five entities he has put individuals that are handpicked by him from Limpopo where he comes from.

The Minister finds no capacity in other provinces but the province where he comes from. The latest handpicked administrator is also alleged to be a partner of the Limpopo Premier of ANC. Now we cannot support a budget that is so prone to corruption that it's going to be in the hands of a Minister who does not want legislative structures in entities so as to have the access to the cookie jar.

The Minister has also failed to fill key positions including that of the chief financial officer in the department, yet we are expected to support a budget that will lack proper internal accountability.

How will the department hold its own entities to account without a CEO and a chief financial officer, CFO? You have a

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the National Skills Fund that continues to underspend millions if not billions of rands annually, Setas that sit with unspent reserves.

The department through its annual performance plan admits that its input does not translate directly to output and such a flawed performance indicator cannot be supported. The annual performance plan, APP, fails to meaningfully address the simple but urgent need to expand higher education and training infrastructure as mentioned also by the Minister, especially as existing institutions cannot adequately accommodate the hundreds of thousands of matriculates leaving school year in year out.

It refers to a University of Ekurhuleni that remains an unfulfilled promise existing only in plans and speeches rather than in physical reality. Well, we've learned this and we've even learned that there's not even a site that can be pointed out by the Minister where that particular university will be built whenever in future.

We will leave it to the people of South Africa, particularly students and young people to deal with this Minister and the

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genuine arrangement that continues to them. Maybe before I end, let me address this very critical issue.

IsiZulu:

Abantu bakithi uma bemasha bemashela izwe labo i-ANC nabangani bayo basibisa imidlwembe. Abantu bakithi abayona imidlwembe uma bemashela izwe labo. Uma bethi ...

English:

... away with illegal foreigners that rape, human traffic, and sell drugs to our people ...

IsiZulu:

... abasiyimidlwembe kodwa ...

English:

... they are exercising their rights that the GNU government is failing to protect. Down with unemployment particularly amongst young people! Down with gender-based violence! Down with alcohol and drug abuse! Down with online betting using NSFAS funds! Forward with voter registration amongst young people. On 4 November, let young people in their number and students vote for uMkhonto weSizwe Party.

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I thank you, Chairperson.

Sesotho:

Mof K L KHAKHAU: Modulasetulo ...

English:

... we are gathered here today to answer one simple question. Should Parliament approve the R149,2 billion allocation to the Department of Higher Education and Training for the 2026-27 financial year?

The 2024-2029 Medium-Term Development Plan identifies two strategic priorities as the basis of any and all assessments of this question. One, does this budget drive inclusive growth and job creation?

In other words, does the APP of the department guarantee increased employment and work opportunities? If so, based on the department's annual performance plan, are we able to reliably calculate, verify and measure the department's performance in achieving this objective?

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Number two, does this budget reduce poverty and tackle the high cost of living? In other words, does the APP of the Department of Higher Education and Training secure training and the transfer of skills for this economy? And if so, again, based on the department's APP, are we able to reliably calculate, verify and measure the department's performance in achieving this objective?

House Chairperson, the Auditor-General of South Africa conducted a proactive review of the 2026-27 APP of the Department of Higher Education and Training. Their review assessment concludes the following.

Medium-Term Development Plan targets are not adequately addressed in this APP. Planned annual targets will result in delayed legislative success. Three, indicators do not measure the desired performance while there is an inconsistency between quarterly targets and annual targets.

Some planned performance targets are not reasonable while others are not aligned to the Mid-Term Development Plan, MTDP. And that this department's means of verification and the

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methods of calculation that they use to measure the strategic role and responsibilities of the department are inadequate.

See, the bottom line here is that Department of Higher Education and Training does not have a results approach to measuring their performance. When they assess their effectiveness and usefulness, their emphasis is on tick box exercises rather than on meaningful outcomes that reflect the impact of service delivery.

Minister Manamela wants us to approve a R149,2 billion allocation without a clear assessment of the department's impact on its performance, transformation and development of the Post-School Education and Training, PSET sector. Minister Manamela wants a R149,2 billion allocation without guaranteeing the sponsors of this budget, being the people of the Republic of South Africa, value for money in return. That is just plain nonsensical.

House Chairperson, outside the Auditor-General's, AG's advice, we already know that this budget does not drive inclusive growth and job creation. We already know that this budget does not reduce poverty and tackle the high cost of living.

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Why? Because the skills development model of this department does not translate to tangible skills development, job creation and economic growth. Instead, all it does is to perpetuate the misalignment of skills transferred and the needs of our economy, all while funding ANC patronage and ANC job cadre schemes.

When the construction Seta isn't funding the alleged criminal life of Vusimuzi Cat Matlala and his likes through unaccredited training agencies, its administrator is setting his own R3 million salary package without authorisation.

All while Setas don't have a state information and technology agency verified database to prove the training they conduct with the R20 billion we give them every year. Since the 2015-2016 financial year to date, Setas have racked up a minimum estimated R4 218 186 000 in fruitless, wasteful and irregular expenditure. And this excludes the previous financial year, and it also excludes unaudited years.

The solution here is simple, Minister Manamela. Scrap Setas and improve technical and vocational learning. Abolish the 1%

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skills levy in its current form and redirect all grant money to empowering TVET colleges.

Minister Manamela, the Skills Development Act already empowers you to dissolve Setas. All that is missing is your political will to do what is right. Put an end to corruption, save South Africa's taxpayers money and transform skills development.

We must abolish the 1% skills levy in its current form and empower employees to choose their own training providers, whether private institutions, TVET colleges or universities that best meet their sectoral and local needs. Such a decentralised demand-driven system will foster competition, innovation and accountability in contrast to the centralised corrupt and inefficient Seta model.

The bottom line here, Chair, is that we must scrap Setas and strengthen post-TVET job placements. And we need to account for every cent of taxpayers' money spent in this department that starts with APPs that make sense and ends with a skills development model that is aligned to the MTDP, one that drives inclusive growth and job creation, one that reduces poverty and tackles the high cost of living.

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I thank you, Chair.

Mr S LONZI: Mr Buti Manamela, when you assumed office, many of us had hope in you. We hoped that after being a Deputy Minister for so many years, you would bring urgency and competence to our sector. We hoped that under your leadership, the Department of Higher Education would become a vehicle for opportunity for the children of the working class and the poor. But the reality is that you have disappointed us, Minister.

Mr Buti Manamela a, your tenure began under the shadow of Sector Education and Training Authority, SETA, board appointment scandals. South Africans watched as patronage and political favouritism took over institutions entrusted with driving skills development in our nation.

Mr Buti Manamela, Parliament and the people of South Africa will not judge you by your intentions alone. The people of South Africa will judge you by your actions and delivery. Mr Buti Manamela, we watched your very first press briefing as Minister eagerly, where you set out clear expectations on stability, governance, efficiency at National Student

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Financial Aid Scheme, NSFAS, and a functional post school system that would deliver for the students and youth of this country. But when we place those expectations against reality, a disappointing pattern emerges.

Let us begin with vacancies in your department. How do you explain that across universities, Technical and Vocational Education and Training, TVET colleges, SETAs, and other entities, vacancies still remain unfilled. With so much unemployment in our country, acting principal, acting Chief Executive Officer, CEO, acting director, acting deputy director general, DDG, emanant features under your leadership is Hollywood. Everyone is acting.

You spoke about stabilising governance, yet instability persists. You spoke about strengthening accountability, yet oversight and administrative gaps remain. Mr Buti Manamela, during the State of the nation address, the President of the country promised us a university in Ekurhuleni. By the way, the promise was first made 2020, six years ago. Months later, your department still does not have a mere site of where the building and construction is going to take place.

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You promised us a stable NSFAS, yet you have plunged us into an even greater crisis. You promised us transparency, yet oversight processes continue to be undermined by delays and missing documentation.

What is even more concerning, Minister, is your disregard for parliamentary accountability. When Parliament called you, sought answers from you regarding the mess that you created at NSFAS, you are literally ran away. You failed to provide the necessary documentation for an oversight meeting and forced us to postpone the meeting that we were supposed to have with you.

Mr Buti Manamela, let us remind you that Parliament is not a suggestion. Oversight is not an option. You have a constitutional obligation to account to this Parliament. You are not doing us a favour. Mr Buti Manamela, our post school education system is in disarray. Every year, universities, TVET colleges, training colleges produce graduates and artisans only for them to go and sit at home without work, income or opportunities.

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You know, Minister, last week we helped a group of students who were doing plumbing, electrical, and I think road repair under construction SETA. And I mention this example because in the United States during the Great Depression, millions of young and unemployed workers were mobilised to public works programmes to build roads, bridges, schools and parks, while earning a wage.

If you go to Germany, vocational education is directly linked to productive economic activity. Young people gain real work experience and training while getting paid.

If you go to India, public employment programmes have been used to build and repair roads and community infrastructure whilst creating mass employment for young people. We can both agree, Minister, that the billions we spend in our SETAs annually are simply not producing the results that we need.

If I were you, Minister, which I'm not, I would repurpose the billions which we use in our SETAs into a National Youth Infrastructure and Maintenance Programme, I repeat, National Youth Infrastructure and Maintenance Programme. Join hands with the construction SETA, local government SETA, transport

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SETA, just to name a few. Work together with our municipalities, Community Education and Training, CET, colleges, training centres, and our TVET colleges. We can literally target over one million young South Africans, Minister.

This nationwide programme must employ and recruit young people to provide accredited training for them in pothole repair, road resurfacing, paving, stormwater systems, bricklaying, welding, plumbing, electrical maintenance, and deploy them into what we will call municipal infrastructure youth battalions across all 257 municipalities. Each municipality can target over 5,000 young people to address potholes and infrastructure decay in our municipality.

Minister, these municipal infrastructure youth battalions must include qualified artisans and engineers to ensure quality and skills transfer. Just imagine, Minister, over one million young people fixing potholes, restoring our roads, restoring drainage systems, rebuilding our communities whilst earning an income. Stop giving our young people R350, Minister. Give them training, make sure that they work and pay them. This is how you transform skills development into real economic

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participation. This is how you transform education into real employment.

Minister, dare I say, perhaps it is not too late. You still have an opportunity to show the people of South Africa that you can be a good Minister. You still have an opportunity to show them that all these years you spent as a Deputy Minister did not go to waste. You have got that chance, Minister. It's either you're going to stand on the side of truth, you're not going to want to deploy your comrades into our entities. They're not going to want to collapse our entities. They're going to stand with the youth and students of South Africa. The choice is yours, Minister. I thank you.

Mr S S ZONDO: Hon House Chairperson, hon Minister, Deputy Minister, hon colleagues. At a time of a rising youth unemployment, institution of higher learning remain essential in developing the skills needed to drive the national development.

The allocation of over R149 billion toward Vote 17 during the 26-27 financial year reflect the importance of post-school education and training sector. We welcome the effort to expand

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the access to universities, TVET colleges, and community training institutions through infrastructure development and student funding support.

The occupational qualifications, artisan training, and digital learning programmes remain important for a changing economy. Therefore, the IFP welcomes the effort to strengthen the TVET colleges as a centre of practical and vocational trainings. New occupational qualifications, digital transformation initiatives, and regional industrial skills partnership can improve the sector's responsiveness to labour market needs.

However, this intervention must translate into measurable employment opportunity for young people rather than remaining policy commitment on papers. Public investment must demonstrate the measurable outcome and accountability.

The persistent challenges with NSFAS funding delays and operational instability continues to place significant strain on students relying on financial assistance. Weak institutions and government oversight within entities such as NSFAS and SETAs continues to undermine public confidence in the sector.

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The continuous shortage of student accommodation remains a serious concern. Too many students commenced the academic year without safety, affordable and dignified accommodation. Delays in infrastructure delivery and maintenance continue to place the pressure on our vulnerable students, particularly those who historically disadvantage and rural communities.

The great urgency is required to ensure that infrastructure projects are completely efficiently and that institutions are properly maintained.

We believe that higher education and skill development must become more closely aligned with the reality of economy and the world of work. South Africa cannot continue to produce graduates while industries continue to experience critical skill shortage. A stronger collaboration between the government institutions and the private sector remain essential in improving graduate employability and expanding workplace opportunity.

Skill development and training programme must remain responsive to labour market needs. Great attention must be given to artisan development, digital skill, green economy

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training, and work-based learning opportunity. Young people require practical pathways into sustainable employment, not only qualification without opportunity.

The continued failure of you, Minister, to fully and consistent account to Parliament and engage on oversight structures remaining deeply concerning. We support this vote, but the reflection of your conduct is troubling the pattern with Higher Education portfolio, where accountability is too often avoided instead of being addressed directly, effective leadership require transparency, responsiveness, and respect to Parliament oversight.

The IFP supports the practical intervention that strengthen the accountability, improve the infrastructure delivery, expand the quality, education and training, and contribute toward the long-term employment.

IsiZulu:

Sikuthathela emqondweni Ngqongqoshe ukuthi ngesikhathi ufika kule Komidi sakwemukela ngezandla ezimhlophe futhi sakwethembisa ukuthi siyokweseka ...

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English:

... of which we still remain with our commitment, to say we support you because we believe you can do it. Don't disappoint us as members of this committee when you are not showing up when we need you. Make sure that the decision that you take on our behalf as South Africans remain the priority of our interest. Make sure that whatever you do, you put us in your mind every time when you are taking decision about South Africans.

The future of this country remains on the decision that we are making today. The future of this country is built through the Department of Higher Education and Training. Thank you, House Chairperson.

Mr A !Q SAULS: Greetings in the wonderful name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

[An unofficial language spoken.]

English:

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We support this budget, but let this House be under no illusion. Our support is not a surrender of our core mandate to put South Africans first.

We do not sit in the Government of National Unity, GNU, to sing lullabies to departments. We sit here to bring raw, unvarnished truth to power. This budget moves our higher education sector forward but it does so on crutches.

Firstly, the report speaks broadly about racial transformation. We know that coloureds and Indians are called black in general, but when the 70% of procurement must be allocated, in reality we are told we are not African in particular.

Let's be very clear. The policy framework of black in general and African in particular is written nowhere in our Constitution. It is a separatist political ideology paraded as revolutionary.

Where are the explicit measurable targets of coloured South Africans? Where are the targets for Indian South Africans?

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Let us correct a deep historical and philosophical sickness in this country. We see parents in white communities, particularly among Afrikaners, telling their children, you are not African. You are only Afrikaner.

I stand here as a proud son of the First Nations to tell the 50% plus white students at Stellenbosch University ...

Afrikaans:

... jou ma en jou pa lieg vir jou.

English:

The grandmother of former Presidents F W de Klerk, Paul Kruger, and the former Prime Minister of South Africa, Jan Smuts, all have one Khoi and San biological grandmother named Krotoa. We birthed you. You did not birth us.

This report promotes policy that says the Khoi and San are not African in particular. It is public knowledge that former President Nelson Mandela and President Thabo Mbeki are Khoi and San descendants. So how can policy consider them African in particular but not the people who birthed them?

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So ... the black students at the University of SA, Unisa, the University of the Witwatersrand, Wits, and everywhere, they are lying to you. You are African in particular because your genetic connection is to the indigenous African people, the first people, the Khoi and San people.

Section 73.2 of this report recommends strengthening oversight on employing foreign nationals. It is a toothless tiger. By keeping academic lecturing on the critical skills list, Home Affairs uses a 100-point visa waiver system that completely bypasses the Employment Services Act. Universities completely skip the basic patriotic requirement to check if a qualified South African is available first.

Lecturing is not a scarce skill in South Africa. The only thing scarce is the political will to protect our own in policy. We call on universities and higher education entities to form a patriotic alliance that creates and enforces policy which puts South Africans first, and that never apologises for demanding that South African children must eat first in the land of their birth. I thank you. Salute!

[An unofficial language spoken.]

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Afrikaans:

Moenie baiza nie!

English:

I thank you, Chair.

Dr W J BOSHOFF: Hon Chair and hon Minister, I apologise for not being able to be in the House this morning. I would also like to start by saying to the hon Sauls that as an Afrikaner I indeed insist on my Africanness, but thank you for the thoughts on that.

If we look at this budget, it's one of the huge Budget Votes in South Africa. It's not one of the minor ones with two or three or maybe R10 billion, but R150 billion being expended on the future. What better way to spend money than on the future.

I think it's very good to start by giving credit where it is due, by saying that indeed in the new dispensation, especially since the National Student Financial Aid Scheme, NSFAS, started with its work, access to learning has increased a lot.

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The problem, however, is that it is not done in a sustainable way. In the long term, NSFAS is not feasible. It costs a lot of money. It's a grant system, meaning the money doesn't ever come back. And, the idea of giving poor people access to learning is indeed for them not to be poor again.

Now, there's no such thing as a free meal. It means somebody pays for it. This means that the whole community of taxpayers, which is not as large as one would've hoped for, pays for the individuals to be taught, to be trained and to be economically successful. Then, they do not have to give anything back in return. They don't have to pay for their studies.

We have made the suggestion that registering beneficiaries at the SA Revenue Service, Sars, so that they can start paying back when they start earning money, is a good idea, especially if the interest rate could be staggered according to ... earn.

Let's go to universities. Universities are not all equal. The department and the previous Minister recognised that when saying that there would be a new system of university colleges and universities, with the criteria not being whether it's

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owned by the state or by private entities, but about governance and the quality of academic service provided.

That must be fulfilled, because part of that will be that a university with a requisite governance ability will also be able to disburse its own NSFAS funding, leaving NSFAS to deal only with those institutions which do not quite have the ability. We do not need a one-size-fits-all approach to this. We actually need to rethink it in such a way that we use our available resources as well as possible.

Regarding the Technical and Vocational Education and Training, TVET, system, it is presented as being very important, but it is funded as not being very important. I do not actually get why. Maybe ... because a lot of the funding earmarked for that through the sector education and training authorities, Setas, is wasted.

Now, the Setas really tried to solve an age-old problem which was formulated somewhere in the early 2000s by an academic like this, when training for the trades and occupations was still divided between the Department of Labour and the Department of Education, which said that the epistemology and

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the ontology of these two departments just did not talk to each other and that training fell in between. The Setas, to be a sectoral education ... [Time expired.]

The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Ms Z Majozi): Hon Boshoff, your time has expired.

Dr W J BOSHOFF: What a pity. I thank you.

Ms M P KOBE: House Chair, I outstretch greetings to hon members in this House and South Africans who are joining us on the online platform.

I have a distinct sense of déjà vu today. This time last year, I stood at the podium delivering remarks on this very Budget Vote of Higher Education. Yet, in the year since, the crisis has only gotten worse.

Let us begin with access. Each year, more than 337 000 learners achieve a bachelor's pass, yet there are only around 202 000 university spaces available. That is a slammed door in the face of over 130 000 deserving students.

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For those who do make it through the door, many of them find themselves with nowhere to sleep. The student housing backlog now exceeds over 500 000 beds. At the start of each academic year, we see students sleeping in hallways, on floors and even on the streets. Hon Minister, what do you actually do with the budget that is allocated to you?

Then there is NSFAS, which was placed under administration in May, with its board now dissolved – an emblem of the complete failure of the GNU and its partners. What do they do in these weekly Cabinet meetings? Where is the sense of urgency and where is the plan?

Each year, tens and thousands of missing-middle students are excluded, not because of the fact that they failed, but because there is simply no funding that is available to them.

What of the Setas, which continue to make headlines for all the wrong reasons, the most recent being the administrator approving three million of his own salary. Action SA has consistently raised the alarm. These bodies are black holes consuming more than 20 billion annually, with little

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transparency, few measurable outcomes and certainly no public confidence.

Walk outside of this Parliament today and ask young people how exactly has Seta improved your life. You will be met with absolute silence.

As Action SA, we do not pick and choose our moments of principle. Since entering this House in 2024, we've been very clear. We will not support a Budget Vote that fundamentally and repeatedly fails students.

As Action SA, we propose real reform. Overhaul NSFAS' leadership. Support the missing middle by raising NSFAS' household income cap to R500 000. Introduce low-interest student loans with repayments deferred until two years after employment and cap that 10% of income for those who fall outside of this cap. Convert hijacked buildings in our central business districts, CBDs, into student accommodation. Scrap the broken Setas and redirect their budgets into an innovative opportunity fund.

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There is none of that boldness in this budget, none of that vision under the GNU, and hon Minister, none of the humility to see, whether it is media reports or reports from your own department, that one fact remains clear – you are presiding over a failing department. Therefore, it is for this reason that Action SA will not be supporting this Budget Vote. I thank you.

The DEPUTY MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION (Dr M Gondwe): House Chairperson, hon members, today youth unemployment amongst those aged 15 to 24 years stands at a staggering 60,9%. This is not merely an economic crisis, it's a national crisis and a ticking bomb that should keep us all awake at night. And unless we act with urgency, it also risks becoming a generational crisis. That is why the work of the Post-School Education and Training, PSET, sector matters so profoundly.

The work of the PSET sector is not only about institutions, qualifications or enrolment statistics, it's about whether young people are able to leave our institutions with employable skills, with pathways into employment, with entrepreneurial capabilities and with hope for a more promising future.

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Hon members, Community Education and Training, CET, colleges occupy a unique and indispensable space within the PSET sector because they sit right at the very intersection of lifelong learning, community empowerment and economic inclusion.

Just recently, we mobilized R5 million towards infrastructure improvements at Emlandeleni Learning Centre in Ndwedwe, KwaZulu-Natal.

We've also secured R90 million towards infrastructure and teaching and learning for the benefit of our nine CET colleges across the country.

Hon members, this month we launched the National Literacy for Empowerment Campaign in the Eastern Cape in partnership with, amongst others, the National House of Traditional and Khoi-San Leaders, SA Local Government Association, Salga, and Old Mutual.

What makes this campaign distinctive and powerful is that it recognises that literacy is not just about reading and writing. The campaign seeks to empower the 3,8 million adults in our country that are functionally illiterate with

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comprehensive literacy skills, including digital literacy, workplace literacy and entrepreneurial literacy. And our CET colleges are at the forefront of this important campaign.

Chairperson, South Africa spends billions and billions of rands on skills development. However, if the truth were to be told, the current skills development regime is failing to produce the employment outcomes our economy and young people urgently require. What we need is for the private sector and industry to become central drivers of skills development because they are better placed than anyone else to understand the needs and demands of the labour market and the economy.

And Minister, I agree with you, there should be no holy cows and there should be no proposal that is off the table. The time has come to replace Sector Education and Training Authorities, Setas, with a system that allows industry and the private sector to procure their skills development needs directly from accredited training institutions and providers.

This system, House Chairperson, can be funded via tax write-offs and the benefit of such a system is that it provides industry and the private sector with an even more direct

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interest in ensuring that their skills development needs and demands are delivered on time, to standard and on budget. The overall impact and effect of this system is that it elevates the quality of skills right across the economy.

Chairperson, when I appeared before this august House the last time, I reported that we were at the tail end of securing strategic partnerships with the private sector aimed at strengthening pathways to employment for students in our Technical and Vocational Education and Training, Tvet, and CET colleges.

Today I'm pleased to report that significant progress has been made in this regard. To date, we've concluded Memorandums of Understanding, MoUs, with Old Mutual, Microsoft, Google, Takealot, with three additional partnerships in the pipeline and two further international partnerships under discussion.

Hon members, through our partnership with Google 10 000 scholarships valued at approximately US\$20 each will be rolled out to support flexible online training in high-demand fields such as cybersecurity, data analytics and digital marketing.

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Chairperson, as I'm addressing this House, Takealot is actively recruiting students from our Tvet and CET colleges for workplace learning opportunities, logistics support programmes and entrepreneurial pathways linked to the digital economy.

I recently had the privilege of engaging students at an Entrepreneurship Indaba hosted by SA Union of Students, SAUS. One of the clearest messages emerging from this indaba is that our students want to work for themselves and want to earn while they learn.

Last week we facilitated engagements between Takealot and SAUS, and Takealot is currently working towards providing 500 students with income-generating opportunities while they're still learning. These are the kind of scalable outcomes, different interventions our young people urgently require.

Chairperson, students from disadvantaged backgrounds and students falling within the missing middle cohort must be supported through a student funding model that is both responsive and efficient.

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However, that student funding model cannot be National Students Financial Aid Scheme, NSFAS. There's no longer a need for NSFAS, NSFAS has repeatedly failed and it's time to replace it with a student funding model which sees our higher education institutions themselves select students and assess their financial needs, and then apply directly to National Treasury for the necessary disbursements to fund tuition and the cost of living allowances.

Ultimately, House Chairperson, hon members, the true measure of the success of the PSET sector cannot simply be about how many people enter into our institutions, but whether those young people leave our institutions with the skills and training that is needed and demanded by our economy. I thank you. Ke a leboga.

Setswana:

Rre G KGABO: Modulasetilo, e re ke simolole ka go isa mafoko a me a maitato kwa lelapeng la ga Thato Molosankwe, o itsagaleng jaaka Senganga kwa porofenseng ya rona ya Bokone Bophirima. Re re lalang ka ntho madi a tshologa.

English:

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Let me now move to issues, hon Minister.

We would like to advise the MKP moving forward to review their development because some of their members here are behaving like presenters of *S'khipha AmaFiles* [investigative reality TV show on Moja Love, DStv Channel 157], instead of dealing with issues that are confronting students ... they would rather opt to waste time and deal with gossips. But let me not be tempted to do the same, hon Minister and House Chairperson.

Chairperson, there is a generation of young South Africans and in particular the descendants of Dr Ruth Segomotsi Mompati who wake up every morning not asking what will they eat, but whether one day they will get an opportunity to participate in a development programme that will lead them to full-time employment? Whether they will ever see a skills centre or a Tvet College in every municipality of their district like any other district in South Africa, hon Minister?

Setswana:

Eno ke pina ya tshwene e o tlo go e utlwang mo go nna ...

English:

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... for the rest of my time in this Parliament. We are not going to keep quiet up until the historical injustice has been addressed.

Part of the question that the students or young people are asking themselves, hon Minister, is whether their bursaries will be processed? Whether their Acting Principal in the satellite college has an authority to sign a single document? Whether this country's institutions are worthy of being trusted? That is the question, that is the real debate of this debate.

We support the budget vote not merely because we support you as a member of the ANC being progressive as a Minister, but we support this budget vote precisely because education is not a luxury, it is an engine of our struggle for radical socioeconomic transformation. It is a catalyst of which a child of a domestic worker can become a doctor, engineer and a scientist. But unfortunately, hon Minister, this engine requires constant overall maintenance.

Minister, part of the maintenance that you need to do is to look into the operations of the department. It cannot be

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correct that we are continuously unable to spend money that is meant to transform the lives of young people in this country through skills development programmes. It cannot be correct that NSFAS continues to appoint a middle person that delays the student disbursement payments.

It cannot be correct, hon Minister, that we are still standing with officials who are unable to achieve their departmental targets, including adhering to the plans that we have agreed to.

Hon Minister, part of the changing or the maintenance that you need to do is to strategically look into the type of leadership that we are having in this department. There is a need for you to strategically review and change the leadership.

Hon Minister, I would want to refer you to the current President of China, when he ascended to Presidency in the Republic of China, and he said, hon Lonzi, there is a need for a new normal because the current normal is abnormal.

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It becomes abnormal, hon Minister, because the current set-up that you are having in the department does not speak to what we seek to achieve as a country. It does not speak to the output. The investment that we are having in the skills development programme must directly speak to the placement of the students in employment, in positions of employment.

What hon Lonzi is raising here ... it's unfortunate that he is trying to be a superstar unnecessarily. But he's a copycat, we know him very well. These are arguments that we have always raised as the ANC-led government, that part of our investment in skills development must speak to the alignment and programmes that are being implemented in municipalities.

[Interjections.]

Why is it that, hon Minister, the problem is not the ...

[Interjections.] ... can I be protected ...

The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Ms Z Majozi): Hon members, order, please! Hon members, let us not drown the speaker, please!

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Mr G D KGABO: Hon Chairperson, let me ... before going to ...
[Interjections.] [Inaudible.] ... issues ... [Interjections.]
...

Ms O M C MAOTWE: But, Chair, we also don't want poets here. I
mean why do we ...

Mr G D KGABO: ... the portfolio committee report raises
matters that ... [Interjections.] ...

The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Ms Z Majozi): Hon Maotwe ... sorry, hon
Kgabo. Hon Maotwe, you have not been recognised. Can you
please stop unmuting!

Continue, hon member!

Mr G D KGABO: Minister, let us respond to the clarion call
made by the President during the state of the nation address,
the only Commander-In-Chief of both armed and unarmed forces
in South Africa. President Cyril Ramaphosa has instructed you
to expand access to institutions of higher learning. Review
your funding model, make sure that we reinvest making sure

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that access to institutions of higher learning is not a luxury.

Hon Deputy Minister Gondwe, you must not be tempted to try and lead this department through a back door. Your attempts to try and impose the DA into the throats of young people of this country will never be accepted. You are so desperate even to use the departmental programmes to gunner support for the DA unnecessarily.

This is the ANC-led government and maybe we need to remind you as our Government of National Unity, GNU, partners. The centre of GNU is being held by the ANC. You have been invited to this party, at any given time we are going to tell you that we review your membership. You must seek an opportunity with us as the ANC-led government in persuading us in making sure that some of these programmes are being implemented.

Hon members, Auditor-General, AG, has flagged several annual performance ... [Inaudible.] ... targets across the sectors as purely designed unmeasurable and misaligned with the smart principle.

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Parliament and the people of South Africa deserve more than vague commitments and compliance theatre.

Hon Minister, let me remind you of something. As a Minister, if you fail to review, even charge or suspend an official in six months as a Minister, I'm going to remind you again, you'll never be able to do that. For once the system co-opts you, you wouldn't be unable to take radical decisions that respond directly to the aspirations of the ANC-led government.

In closing, hon House Chairperson, it is quite important for us to emphasise our position and our commitment as the ANC in supporting this Bill.

The credibility of our qualification framework is the credibility of our entire education system. The ANC supports strengthening the legislative authority of Council of Higher Education, CHE, to enforce compliance amongst universities.

The review of Higher Education Act, Minister, must not only temper with the autonomy of institutions of higher learning, but you must allow Parliament to exercise its constitutional

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authority of holding universities accountable. Thank you very much.

Mr N L S KWANKWA: House Chair, the greatest tragedy facing South Africa's institutions of higher learning is that they continue to produce thousands of graduates who cannot find work. Every year, young people leave universities with qualifications, yet without practical experience and skills demanded by the modern economy, they struggle to get jobs. Many are forced to continue to study, simply to remain competitive and simply to remain active, only to become overqualified for entry-level jobs when they apply for them. Graduate unemployment has become one of the biggest economic and social crises in our country now. Qualification alone is no longer enough.

Our institutions of higher learning must adopt integrated curricula that combine academic knowledge with practical training, digital competence and industry-relevant skills. We cannot continue teaching young people theory alone, while the global economy rapidly advances through technologies such as artificial intelligence, AI, for instance. The result is a

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generation of graduates who reach the age of 35 without ever gaining meaningful work experience.

During the 2026, state of the nation address, Sona, the President correctly stated that South Africa's skills development system requires a fundamental overhaul. However, how can that overhaul succeed while technical and vocational education and training, TVET, colleges remain neglected and underresourced? A recent committee report exposed the crisis surrounding the outdated National Accredited Technical Education Diploma, Nated, Report 191 Curriculum in TVET colleges. Courses such as business studies and office management have been heavily criticised for focussing almost entirely on theory, while offering very little to no practical training or work experience.

Although the Department of Higher Education and Training is committed to phasing out the Report 191 programmes by 2026, and replacing them with occupational qualifications, curriculum reform alone will not solve the problem. Lecturers still lack adequate equipment, proper training, industry exposure and the resources necessary to modernise vocational training adequately. Another crisis confronting students is

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the crashing burden of student debt. National Student Financial Aid Scheme, NSFAS, support remains limited and exclusionary. Missing middle students, those pursuing second undergraduate qualifications and students studying at private institutions are often left with no financial support at all.

As a result, thousands of our learners are unable to pay tuition fees and are trapped in student debt. In 2025, South African institutions collectively carried approximately about R9,3 billion in unpaid student debt accumulated since 2023, yet many institutions continue to withhold degrees and qualifications, certificates and academic transcripts of students, and this further endears students. This practice is ... thank you. [Time expired.]

IsiXhosa:

Hayi lincinci maan eli xesha.

Xitsonga:

Ttn S M GANA: Mutshamaxitulu wa Yindlu ...

IsiZulu:

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... sithe abafana bazobuya nayo eMbombela. Babuye nayo abafana ...

English:

... therefore, we congratulate the three-time treble champions, the institution that's Orlando Pirates, more than a football club. It's a way of life. It's a way of life, more than a football club. Hon members and Minister, we are investing in our young people just for them to live. We are losing our best and brightest because of a lack of opportunities. We know that this is largely due to a lack of employment opportunities after they graduate. However, we cannot ignore the blame that must rest at your feet.

Since the start of your term, this department has been in the news for all the wrong reasons. NSFAS and the Sector Education and Training Authorities, Setas, being front of mind, student protests about the lack of funding, delays at NSFAS, and as we now have seen at the University of the Western Cape, UWC, the deplorable conditions of our public education institutions have now become an annual event. Given these conditions and uncertainty, we can certainly not blame our young people for leaving our institutions, but also the country. Academic staff

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across our universities are reaching retirement age and there is not nearly enough new talent who are ready and willing to step in.

This is not an accident. The number of post-graduates is increasing, but they are not staying. Uncertain tenures, a lack of funding, and the state of governance in our tertiary education sector is driving our best away. Even when they exit academia, seeking to contribute their knowledge and expertise to other sectors of our economy, they are faced with closed doors. We know that we are in an unemployment crisis and we have been for a long time. A casual observer might then ask, why does this crisis continue to deepen while we have entities like our Setas? It has long been time that we faced facts. The only purpose the Setas now serve is for the individual to syphon billions of rands meant to invest in our people. Setas have failed and we must rethink their mandate, governance, and frankly, their existence.

Hon members, South Africa has become a university for the world where the lucky few who are able to study do so only to take that knowledge and leave. Let us build a country of

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opportunities. Let us invest in people and give them the chance to return on that investment.

Xitsonga:

Ndza khensa, Mutshamaxitulu wa Yindlu.

English:

Up the Bucks. Once and always. The three-times treble champions of South Africa.

Xitsonga:

Ndzi khensile swinene, Mutshamaxitulu wa Yindlu. [Nkarhi wu herile.]

The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Ms Z Majozi): Up the Bucs. Thank you very much, hon member. Is there member from Bosa? The ATM! I will recognise the Deputy Minister of Higher Education, Dr Dube-Ncube. Hon members, please. Hon members, can we please give ... hon member! Continue, hon Deputy Minister.

The DEPUTY MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION (Dr N Dube-Ncube): Hon House Chairperson, hon members, hon Minister, Deputy Ministers, hon Chairperson of the portfolio committee and all

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the hon members, when I begin preparing for these remarks, a one question I had to ask myself, what have we done about our young people? Have we equipped them with the knowledge, skills and opportunities? Or have we left them on the margins of our democracy they inherited but cannot have fully inhabit? I ask not because I accuse, but I care deeply, because history is unforgiving to nations that neglect our youth. To a country that has ever built lasting prosperity on the foundation of abandoned young people. No democracy has survived the quiet erosion on the hope of the rising youth generation.

The question is the moral compass on this budget. It is why the work in this department is not administrative in its nature alone. It is a nation-building work. It is the act of nation, of love and its nation. Hon members, the budget has been outlined. The university has got 82% of the department's budget. However, let us be clear. These numbers mean nothing if it's not touching the lives of our people. Every rent in the line of this budget is access to the poor. It is the hope of the working-class child. It is the bursary that transforms the family's trajectory.

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These allocations represent the most concrete declaration of democracy that changed the material conditions of our people, especially those that have waited longest. MKP, you are contradicting yourself in this regard, because the pro-poor children, when they're not passed, it will have untold pain to the children of this country.

IsiZulu:

Bazokwazi kanjani abantwana ukuphasa uma ngabe le bhajethi ingaphasiswa.

English:

I'm proud to report that the department is constantly achieving expenditure performance of 99%. Compliance alone is not an ambition. Our objective is to build institutions worthy of public trust. When weaknesses exist, they will be corrected. Where irregular expenditure is found, consequence management will follow. Where ethical breaches occur, there will be accountability. The democratic state cannot demand sacrifice from the poor while tolerating recklessness and unethical behaviour in the institution. That is not governance. That is betrayal, and we refuse to be part of it.

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Through performance, compact enrolment planning and graduate trace of studies, we are ensuring that universities' output align with the skills agenda and the economy demands. We need graduates who are not merely employable, but capable of driving industrialisation entrepreneurship. That is the standard we are setting, and it is the standard of the people that they demand. Universities should not have interest in understanding their student that they are employable, but they must be employed, but they also must understand where those students are.

I want to speak plainly about the future, the world of our children that they will inhabit and that they will shape. The artificial intelligence, green industrialisation, robotics, biotechnology, data centres, nations that are built on the advanced skills pipeline, that will merely not fall behind. Our commitment to science and technology, engineering, arts and mathematics, it's not educational slogan. It is a sovereign capability strategy. The nation that will define the century, that will not those that only extract minerals, but those that nation that produce ideas, that produce technology innovation, the solution of humanity. South Africa must position itself not as a consumer of global knowledge, but as

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producer of African knowledge and innovation, Africa research and Africa intellectual leadership, the vision that fills with hope and with agents of purpose.

We must never normalise the despair of our young people. We cannot accept South Africa where millions move from classroom to unemployment, from qualification to hopelessness, from ambition to exclusion. When young people lose faith in the future of society, we lose direction. Therefore, when we lose confidence in democracy itself, nation endangers the terrain. The Cater Care Career Programme Service Initiative is therefore not a programme, it is a promise. A promise that no young people will feel abandoned simply by not being accessed to immediate metric.

We are expanding TVET colleges and community colleges. Our international scholarship and our strategy are about ensuring that South Africa students compete globally ... [Time is expired.]

Mr I ISMAIL-MOOSA: Hon Chairperson, hon Ministers, fellow beloved South Africans, in the name of Almighty, the most gracious and the most merciful, Al Jama-ah supports the goal

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of expanding access to Higher Education and skill development for all South Africans, particularly those from poor and working-class communities. While significant progress has been made, many students continue to face challenges such as financial hardship, accommodation shortages, inadequate support services, and limited access to digital resources. Education must not only be accessible, but also affordable, relevant, and of high quality.

Al Jama-ah calls for stronger alignment between our universities, Technical and Vocational Education and Training, TVET, colleges, and the needs of the economy. South Africa requires graduates and artisans who can contribute meaningfully to our economic growth, entrepreneurship, innovation, and job creation. Greater investment must also be made in technical and vocational training. Skills artisans remain critical to rebuilding our infrastructure and addressing unemployment.

Al Jama-ah urges the department to strengthen measures against corruption, maladministration, and the misuse of public funds within the institutions of higher learning. Education remains

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one of the most powerful tools to break the cycle of poverty and inequality.

Let us ensure that no deserving student is denied an opportunity to succeed because of their financial circumstances. Al Jama-ah supports a higher education system that empowers our youth, develops their talents, and prepares them to become productive citizens who will contribute to the prosperity of our nation. Education for all, opportunity for all, prosperity for all, skills today, jobs tomorrow, a stronger South Africa forever.

Invest in our youth, empower our future, build our nation. No student should be left behind, no talent left undiscovered from classrooms to careers, empowering South Africa's future. I thank you. Malibongwe! [Praise!.]

Dr D C CHRISTIANS: Hon Chairperson, Minister, Deputy Ministers, hon members, there comes a point where we must stop managing crisis and start confronting the truth. And the truth confronting South Africa today is our post-school education which is becoming increasingly fragile despite consuming billions of rand every single year.

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For the 2026-27 financial year, this House is appropriate R149,2 billion to Vote 17. Yet despite this enormous allocation, South Africans continue witnessing systemic dysfunction year after year. Almost all of the department's budget is transferred externally to universities, colleges, National Student Financial Aid Scheme, NSFAS, and entities.

Parliament is therefore not merely funding a department, it is funding an entire ecosystem expected to produce graduates, artisans, researchers, innovation, economic growth, and opportunity for millions of South Africans. But the question before this House is whether the current system is still capable of converting expenditure into outcomes.

The clearest example of this crisis is NSFAS. The NSFAS alone receives more than R50,9 billion under programme three, while direct university subsidies total approximately R49 billion. Now that should concern every member of this House. While NSFAS allocations continue to increase, universities themselves are not experiencing meaningful real growth in operational funding.

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Institutions continue facing rising municipal costs, aging infrastructure, accommodation shortages, and growing student debt burdens. At the same time, South Africa now faces the extraordinary situation where its primary student funding institution has entered administration for the third time, through administrations, repeated board collapses, legal disputes, accommodation payment delays, and continuing financial exclusion of our students.

One of the greatest failures unfolding before this House is the collapse of hope of the missing middle. Now approximately R3,8 billion was allocated to this NSFAS loan scheme intended to support students, yet it was reported to us in committee that less than 2 000 students received this funding. The reality is that what began as an operational crisis at NSFAS has evolved into a systemic risk to the entire post-school educational sector.

Every academic year now begins under a cloud of uncertainty. The tragedy is that while oversight and intervention structures expand, students continue suffering. The annual performance plan, APP, now includes an entire NSFAS remedial action framework, simply to restore basic operational

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credibility. Now think about that. Think how serious that is. A student funding entity now requires ongoing remedial plans, monitoring mechanisms, and intervention structures simply to perform its most basic mandate.

Parliament must confront the reality that the current NSFAS centred model architecture has reached the point of institutional failure. Despite increasing expenditure, young people still find themselves in unsafe accommodation, struggling to access allowances, facing delayed payments, and being blocked from graduation due to historical debt and financial exclusion. At this very moment, universities, TVET colleges, and Community Education and Training, CET, colleges face severe infrastructure pressures.

Expenditure on capital assets declines from R441,6 million to R249,4 million, a reduction of more than 40%. How does the government speak about expansion, innovation, and student success while capital investment is collapsing in real terms?

The university sector itself remains under enormous pressure. The future of research and innovation funding through the

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National Research Foundation, NRF, and the broader research ecosystem is also in jeopardy.

South Africa cannot speak about economic growth, industrialisation, the digital economy, and global competitiveness while weakening the very research base needed to drive future development. Research funding is not a luxury item. It is a strategic national investment every university should have.

Perhaps the most neglected component of this sector remains Community Education and Training colleges. These are institutions meant to support our country's most vulnerable communities, yet they continue operating on the margins of the system.

Perhaps the clearest sign of how deep the higher education crisis has become is that even Parliament struggles to obtain certainty and accountability on NSFAS.

The Minister's inability to account fully and consistently to Parliament on NSFAS should concern every member in this House. Meetings collapse, reporting is delayed, and critical

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questions remain unanswered. And until accountability, stability, and delivery replace crisis management, this sector will continue to fail the very generation it was meant to empower. I thank you.

IsiXhosa:

Nksz. Y GOVANA: Sihlalo weNdlu ohloniphekileyo, Mphathiswa wesebe, ooSekela Mphathiswa, amalungu ale Ndlu nabafundi bonke beli lizwe, bhotani. Ivoti 17 yoHlahlomali ijongene nowona mbuzo ubaluleke kakhulu kweli xesha lorhulumente olawula ngentando yesininzi. Lo mbuzo ubuza ukuba singawakha njani urhulumente osebenzayo nophuhliso? Urhulumente onokoyisa intswelangu, ukungalingani nobuhlomphepo. Impendulo kukwakha inkqubo eyomeleleyo yale mihla yokuphuhlisa izakhono ekwaziyo ukulungiselela abantu bethu uqoqosho olutshintsha ngokukhawuleza. Loo nto ixhaswa yile voti yohlahlomali.

I-ANC ihleli izibophelela ekwakheni urhulumente osebenzayo wophuhliso osekelwe ekuphenduleni, ubunkokeli obunesimilo, uphuhliso lwezakhono notshintsho kuqoqosho. Njengoko owayesakuba nguMongameli uNelson Mandela wasikhumbuza ukuba, "imfundo sesona sixhobo sinamandla onosisebenzisa ukuguqula ihlalathi". Namhlanje imfundo kufuneka ibe yinto esebenzayo

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nakwimizi yemveliso zobuxhakaxhaka banamhlanje kwaye igqwese kwezengqesho.

Siyakwamkela ukuqhubela phambili kotyalomali kuzwelonke lophuhliso lwezakhono nangona kusekhona imiqobo kwezoqoqosho. Ingeniso eveliswa ...

English:

... from the skills development levy ...

IsiXhosa:

... kulindeleke ukuba inyuke ukusuka kumaR25,6 billion ukuya kumaR31,1 billion kwesi sigaba salo nyakamali. Oku kubonisa ukuba urhulumente okhekelwe yi-ANC uyaqhubeka nokubeka phambili uphuhliso lwabantu njengesiseko sokubuyisela nokuguqula uqoqosho.

English:

Hon members, allocations alone are not sufficient. These investments must produce measurable outcomes such as artisans, technicians, engineers, entrepreneurs and employable graduates who can drive industrialisation, infrastructure development and inclusive growth. Thus through this progressive Budget

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Vote No 17, Technical and Vocational Education and Training, TVET, colleges are positioned at the central to South Africa's economic future. We will not tire until TVET colleges become institutions of choice for young people pursuing technical and occupational careers. Yet we must confront uncomfortable realities within parts of the sector.

The continued roll-out of outdated programmes, absolute workshops and aging infrastructure undermines students' employability and weakens our economic competitiveness.

IsiXhosa:

Ngolu hlahlomali inkqubo yentsebenziswano phakathi kwesebe, amashishini neeSeta kufuneka ikhuthazwe ukukhulisa izakhono. Mphathiswa, ebeme apha uSekela Mphathiswa wakho, ejongela phantsi iiSeta ebethelela ukuba azisayi fumana nkxasomali. Thina sime apha kule Ndlu ngelithi kufuneka kuqiniseke ulongamelo ...

English:

... to the Setas so that they respond to their mandate.

IsiXhosa:

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Nangona kunjalo, ukuze kufezekiswe amathemba namaphupha ezigidi zolutsha iikholeji zoqeqesho ezi14 zindawo zovavanyo lezorhwebo. Oko kunciphisa inani lwabafundi abenza izicelo kumaziko emfundo abucala aqhubela phambili nokungalingani, ukukhutshelwa ngaphandle nokwandisa inani le ntswelangqesho. I-ANC iyalwamkela olu hlahlomali olujoliswe ukuhlaziya iindawo zokusebenza, iilabhoratri, nezixhobo ezixhasa imveliso ephucukileyo, amandla ahlaziyekayo, ubuxhakaxhaka bethekhknoloji nobuchule boshishino ngokufanayo nophuhliso lokufundisa. Kufuneka sifumane utyalomali oluzinzileyo ingakumbi kwizifundo zomsebenzi wezandla kuquka nokukhuliswa kwethekhnoloji.

English:

Hon House Chairperson, we support this budget ...

IsiXhosa:

... kodwa asikwazi ukwehla kweli qonga singakukhumbuzanga Mphathiswa ukuba zonke ezinto thina siyi-ANC sixakeke ngazo entsimini. Kukho abanye abonela nje ukuzikhwaza apha kweli qonga bethetha ngalo umpakumpaku kuphela. Uze uncede ubajonge. Enkosi.

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The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Mr Z Majozi): Thank you very much, hon Govana.

IsiXhosa:

USIHLALO WENDLU (Nksz Z Majozi): Dlamini ohloniphekileyo, asibethani apha kule Ndlu.

English:

Hon members, I will now give the hon Minister of Higher Education close off the Budget Vote.

The MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION: Hon House Chairperson, as I was sitting there listening to the hon Msezane and to the hon Christians I wondered which version of the two parties will I take to campaign because the hon Msezane went to town and the hon Letsie we need to frame that part of his speech where he was talking about how good the ANC-led government has been through the work that we are doing at National Student Financial Aid Scheme, NSFAS.

I have never heard anybody praise NSFAS as you did today.

Thank you very much for that. You are doing the extra work for us.

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However, importantly and in the immediate I think our intention is to stabilise. And exactly some of the concerns that the hon Christians have raised. That we need to stabilise NSFAS and then have a discussion of what needs to be done.

The Deputy Minister Gondwe is getting way ahead in terms of what her proposals are. It is probably in the nature of the beast of the Government of National Unity, GNU. However, the urgent task for us is stabilising the National Student Financial Aid Scheme. We are quite open to some of the proposals and suggestions that hon members have made.

The same applies to Sector Education and Training Authorities, Setas, we have presented to government. I think it is quite clear that we cannot have the Setas as they are. I think we are making a few commitments in the annual performance plan, APP, hon Khakhau.

I remember you missed the presentation by the Auditor-General, AG. I am not surprised that you repeated what was actually written in the AG's submission on our APP. Actually, the APP's remarks were this is one of the most improved annual performance plans, firstly.

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Secondly, yes there are few areas that we need to improve on. However, I think to exaggerate the challenges is actually politically opportunistic. Yes, we acknowledge that there were issues with regards to our indicators, but we have put efforts in ensuring that our APPs are aligned.

The challenge around student historical debt and sustainable student funding is and will be at the centre of our discussion and I think tomorrow we are having an engagement on that. This is a priority. We should be getting a report from our university branch through the work that they were doing with the United Student Achievers Program, Usap and SA Union of Students, Saus, SA Technical Vocational Education and Training Student Association, Savetsa and various other players in this regard.

If you look at the quantum of student debt, and you look at the demand for student loans from NSFAS, it shows you that somewhere there is a problem, and we need to fix it. If we have high demand for student debt, on the one hand but the uptake for NSFAS student debt is that low we need to resolve what the problem is. I think we have had some of the discussion in the portfolio committee.

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Yes, of course, even in the study group!

Ms K L KHAKHAU: Hon House Chairperson, on a point of order.

The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Mr Z Majozi): Hon members, hon Minister, can you please hold, there is a point of order.

Hon Khakhau.

Ms K L KHAKHAU: Hon House Chairperson, I am rising to found out whether the Minister wants to clarify what he means by study groups that agreed on the budget?

The MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION: [Laughter!]

The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Mr Z Majozi): I do not think the Minister said there were study groups, but he did mention a study group maybe he was referring to the portfolio committee, but he will get an opportunity to respond on the issue.

The MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION: Thank you.

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So, we think this is a discussion that we obviously need to be seized with because of the challenge of quantum of the student debt. This is quite urgent. So, it is something we need to look at.

Now, other than the *shwashi*/here say elements, the hon Msezane, I think that generally there has been very good proposals. However, what startled me hon Lonzi was your two-part speech. The first one being an order to me, which of course I expect because what is the opposition if it comes here and shower us with flower rain words without raising its criticisms?

The second one which I you know since learnt was that it was plagiarism on your part because these points and grand proposals that you presented as your original words you presented in the portfolio committee. Hon Letsie.

Mr S LONZI: Hon House Chairperson, on a point of order.

The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Mr Z Majozi): Hon Minister, please hold.

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Hon Lonzi what is the point of order?

IsiXhosa:

Mnu. S LONZI: Ndiyakonyusela ngoku, ndithi unguSomlomo.

English:

Hon House Chairperson, I know that the ANC has a tendency to think that all the ideas belong to them

Mr W T LETSIE: What is the point of order, Chair

The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Mr Z Majozi): Hon Letsie, you have not been recognised can you switch off your mic.

Thank you.

Mr S LONZI: Please.

The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Mr Z Majozi): Alright, order hon members! From both sides, order please!

Hon members, hon members!

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I am going to call you by names. I am going to call you by names, all of you and I will call from both sides of this House because you are howling and I cannot even hear what the Lonzi wants to say. So, can we please, the hon Msezane, you are as much as not a presiding officer. Can you please behave!

The hon Lonzi.

Mr S LONZI: Thanks for protecting me, hon House Chairperson from the vultures on the other side.

We know that the ANC likes to claim ideas although they always fail to implement. However, it would be wrong for the Minister to accuse a Member of Parliament of plagiarism without a substantive motion. So, just on the rules hon House Chairperson, please ask the Minister to withdraw. The committee chairperson does not have the capacity to give me ideas. I am the one who produces ideas in the committee and the Minister knows this.

The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Ms Z Majozi): Thank you very much, hon Lonzi. However, I do think that is a point of debate. O, we

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cannot then call it a point of order. It will then no be regarded as such. Thank you.

Continue, hon Minister.

The MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION: I have access to tenedine. So, we will look at all the data. However, I think in the overall that we really appreciate those who turned up to support the Budget Vote. We will also consider some of the points raised in opposition of the budget. We are committed to ensure that education and skills is stabilised. The ecosystem delivers to the people of South Africa. Thank you very much.

The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Ms Z Majozi): Thank you very much, hon Minister. Hon members that conclude the debate. However, hon members are reminded that there are two debates scheduled simultaneously at two today. The International Relations and Co-operation Budget Vote No 6, debate will be held in the Good Hope Chamber, While the Trade Industry and Competition Budget Vote No 39 will take place in the Committee Room M46. That concludes the debate and the business of the mini-plenary session. The mini-plenary will now rise. Thank you very much, hon members.

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Debate concluded.

The mini-plenary session rose at 11:53.

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