

**SPEECH PRESENTED TO THE MPUMALANGA PROVINCIAL LEGISLATURE BY THE MEC FOR FINANCE, MR J.L MAHLANGU, MPL, ON THE OCCASION OF TABELING THE MPUMALANGA BUDGET: 2009/2010**

**Wednesday, 25 February 2009**

Madam Speaker, Mrs YN Phosa;  
Honourable Premier, Mr TSP Makwetla;  
Honourable Deputy Speaker, Mr BJ Nobunga;  
My predecessor, former MEC for Finance, Mrs Mmathulare Coleman;  
Colleagues in the Executive Council;  
Honourable Members of the Provincial Legislature;  
Members of the House of Traditional Leaders;  
The Acting Director General, Mr J.S Mgidi;  
The Head of the Department of Finance, Mr R.S Tshukudu;  
Other Heads of Departments;  
Religious leaders and representatives of the civil society;  
Comrades and friends;  
Members of the Media;  
Distinguished Guests;  
Ladies and Gentlemen;

*There's always sunshine, after a storm!*

Madam Speaker, Honourable Members, when we tabled the Adjustment Budget in November last year, we were optimistic that the current global economic turmoil shall come to pass. It is not yet over, as the Minister of Finance indicated that “...it is **even more severe than anyone anticipated.**” Despite all this, we must take solace as a country and a province, that *there's always sunshine, after a storm!*

In the words of President Kgalema Motlanthe when delivering the State of the Nation Address on 06 February 2009, and I quote:

*“Whatever economic storms may pound our shores; whatever political uncertainties may visit our collective consciousness in a transition – our nation is in a good state.....Ours is a journey of hope and resilience.”*

We are indeed on a journey of hope, that tomorrow will be better than today, just as today is better than yesterday. It is forecast that output growth will improve in 2010 and beyond. Although the price of petrol went up once more earlier this month, the price of diesel and paraffin continues to go down, bringing a sigh of relief to our people. Further good news is that economists predict that inflation will continue to go down to within the Reserve Bank's 3 – 6 percent target range, as early as the second quarter of this year. Our main challenge now, is to work together to rebuild our economy, in order to continue to create decent job opportunities, thereby addressing poverty.

When delivering the ANC's January 8th Statement on the occasion of the 97th anniversary of the organisation, ANC President, Comrade Jacob Zuma urged us to, and I quote:

*“We must protect our democracy and continue to put the struggle for a better life for all South Africans at the centre of our work.... Despite major achievements since 1994, much still needs to be done. Many households and communities remain trapped in poverty. Unemployment remains stubbornly high.”*

This call by the ANC President Madam Speaker, cannot be over-emphasised. We acknowledge as government that indeed, much still needs to be done. However in order to achieve all what we planned to do, we strongly believe that **working together we can do more.**

Our struggle for the total emancipation of our people from the bondages of poverty and hunger, continues. We commit to speed up change and deliver services in a more efficient and faster way. Our track-record as the ANC-led administration, speaks for itself - we can only do more, to continue to better the lives of our people.

It is therefore against this background, that we commit our budget to address the following priorities:

1. **Creating decent work opportunities and sustainable livelihoods;**
2. **Providing food security for all (No one shall go hungry);**
3. **Harnessing rural, agricultural development and land reform;**
4. **Working towards a free and compulsory education for all children (ensuring that the doors of learning and culture are opened);**
5. **Providing quality health care for all.**

As we look beyond the storm, it is imperative that we share with this august house, what the prospects of the country's and the province's economy are for the year ahead and beyond.

### **Outlook for the South African economy**

Although South Africa has to a large extent escaped the direct impact of the negative international economic developments during the course of 2008, the indirect effects of the global recession on the country is already noticeable. The South African economy grew at an annualised 0.2 per cent in the third quarter of 2008, recording the lowest quarterly economic growth in a decade. Statistics South Africa announced yesterday that the country's real GDP at market prices for the fourth quarter of 2008, decreased by an annualized rate of 1.8 per cent. Manufacturing output plunged by a record 21.8 per cent and was the main contributor to the negative economic growth rate.

This brought the 2008 growth rate to 3.1 per cent, compared with 5.1 per cent in 2007. Economists forecast a negative rate of more than 1 per cent for the first quarter of 2009. This will then mean that the South African economy is officially in a recession. A recession is defined as two quarters running of shrinking economic output. The good news is that inflation has improved considerably since September last year. Year-on-year CPIX inflation peaked at 13.6 per cent in August 2008, and dropped to 10.3 per cent in December 2008.

The inflation figures published by Statistics South Africa this morning, indicate that the country's official inflation rate (the percentage change in the CPI for all urban areas) was 8.1 per cent in January 2009. This is the first annual inflation rate published using the new CPI basket and weights. A downward trend of inflation is now firmly in place, which will impact positively on interest rate cuts during 2009. This has been attributed to the falling fuel prices, which fell significantly towards the end of last year. Furthermore, the lower inflation and interest rates, coupled with the country's infrastructure programme of billions of Rands, are likely to help boost growth this year.

One of the major challenges facing the country, is to reduce the unemployment rate. According to Statistics South Africa's Quarterly Labour Force Survey, the country's unemployment official rate improved from 23.5 per cent in the first quarter of 2008 to 23.1 per cent in the second quarter, but worsened slightly to 23.2 per cent in the third quarter. Overall, employment opportunities declined by 0.5 per cent or 74 000 job opportunities in the third quarter of 2008.

Our banking system remains sound, thanks to the financial infrastructure and the effective regulatory framework in place. However we must not be complacent, as according to Minister Manuel, "it is incumbent on us to remain vigilant, to sharpen our regulatory oversight and to work with banks to identify any potential problems early and deal with them decisively."

## **Economic prospects of the Province**

The economy of Mpumalanga is forecast to grow at a slower growth rate of 2.7 per cent in 2009, which is 0.7 per cent less compared to 2008. Our largest contributors to the diverse provincial economy continues to be manufacturing at 19.4 per cent, mining (18.1 per cent), community and government services (15.3 per cent), trade and finance (13 per cent each). It is forecast that the provincial economic growth will average 3.8 per cent for the period 2007-2012. During this period, the construction sector is expected to grow at a rate of 7.5 per cent, the manufacturing sector at 4.5 per cent and the electricity sector at 4 per cent.

Madam Speaker, Honourable Members, we further believe that growth and development in the province, should be promoted and stimulated by increased focus on the following, among others:

- Promoting the Mpumalanga Flagship projects that should impact on economic growth and poverty reduction; and should also generate multipliers through linkages to the broader economy;
- Identifying and promoting viable and bankable projects in order to attract private sector funding and foreign investment;
- Maximizing and utilising the potential and competitive advantages of the tourism industry;
- Maximizing the agricultural potential of the province through the manufacturing of bio-fuel and agro-processes;
- Expanding in the construction industry - especially in new infrastructure developments;
- Promoting and developing small enterprises by establishing co-operatives in the growth sectors;
- Promoting growth in sectors like transportation and logistics, bulk water and sanitation infrastructure.

The Mpumalanga Growth Fund has been launched. The Fund is a focused government intervention to unlock growth in sectors and areas with potential for economic growth. We can report that the fund has been registered with the High Court in Pretoria as a legal entity; and that two fund trustees have been appointed. We will soon appoint additional three Trustees, who will represent the private sector. We have, as the provincial government, already pledged a seed capital of R200 million for the fund, and hope that the private sector will soon come to the party, and support our commitment towards growing our economy. Our aim is to attract at least R1 billion from the private sector.

Our major challenge as a Province, is to reduce poverty, which is still very high. According to a credible source like Global Insight, Mpumalanga's poverty rate declined from 55.1 per cent in 2001 to 51.1 per cent (that is, 1 878 421 poor people) in 2007. As government, we continue to provide a safety net to the poor, in the form of social security grants to millions of our vulnerable people. Children, orphans, the aged and people with disabilities remain our premier beneficiaries.

As a further intervention, we have just recently launched the Anti-Poverty War Room Campaign at Sikhwahlane in Nkomazi, with the sole purpose of fighting poverty by providing a cushion for families living in hardship. Priority areas for the roll-out of the programme have been identified, and all poverty stricken areas of the province will eventually be covered.

With regard to unemployment, Statistics South Africa's Quarterly Labour Force Survey indicates that the Province's unemployment rate stood at 23.2 per cent in the third quarter of 2008, which is the same as the national average. This is a decrease from 23.7 per cent in the first quarter, and 24.8 per cent in the second quarter of 2008.

Our challenge now as the Province, is to convert economic growth into employment, especially jobs in the formal sector.

It should be a priority to increase the education and skills levels of the population and labour force, in order to increase the employability of our citizens and to integrate them into the economic mainstream.

### **Economic prospects for the Districts**

As far as the contribution of our districts to the Province's economic growth is concerned, Nkangala continues to contribute the highest at 38.7 per cent, followed by Gert Sibande at 32 per cent and Ehlanzeni 29.3 per cent. Gert Sibande is very prominent in the province with agriculture accounting for 41.3 per cent and manufacturing 54.6 per cent.

Nkangala is responsible for 65.8 per cent of the provincial mining activities and 71.4 per cent of electricity. The economy of Ehlanzeni is very diverse and dominating in the construction (42.7 per cent), trade (46.8 per cent) and community and government services sector (45.2 per cent).

Nkangala District contributes 9.4 per cent more to the provincial economy than Ehlanzeni, while Gert Sibande contributes 2.7 per cent more to the provincial economy than Ehlanzeni. There is no doubt that Ehlanzeni District has the potential to make a bigger contribution to the provincial economy than it does at present. We say this because Ehlanzeni does not only have the largest population, that is, 41.9 per cent of the population of the province, but also that it has a wider industrial base than the other two districts.

The three districts should therefore, take full advantage of the competitive advantages they have in their respective sectors, in order to enable the Mpumalanga Economic Growth Agency (MEGA), to formulate appropriate sector and investor targeting strategies. This will not only stimulate economic growth, but will also impact positively on poverty and unemployment reduction in the province.

## **Budget Policy as we look beyond the storm**

As indicated earlier, we cannot avoid the current global economic turmoil, but we can adjust our policies in order to provide a cushion for our people, who are facing serious economic hardship. It is therefore going to be exceedingly significant that as a Province, we take bold steps to improve cash and budget management in order to reduce fiscal risks to the Provincial Budget. In this regard, all Departments are urged to monitor spending closely and ensure that we remain within our budget, by taking specific cost curtailment measures for the remainder of the financial year, and the coming financial year. Such cost curtailment measures, should focus on areas of spending that are non-core and would not adversely impact on pro-poor service delivery.

Departments are further urged to shift funds from non-core areas of spending, towards programmes that meet the broader social and development objectives of Government. We should thus warn that the Executive Council will take steps against any Accounting Officer, who does not adhere to these measures, and who continues to incur irregular or unauthorised expenditure.

## **Technical adjustments to the Provincial Fiscal Framework**

### **Compensating for inflationary pressure**

In order to compensate for higher than projected inflation, an amount of R1.2 billion will be allocated to the Province over the MTEF. An amount of R384.8 million will be allocated in the budget for the 2009/10 financial year; R408.3 million in 2010/11 and R423.3 million in 2011/12. Other inflationary adjustments will be in education and health. For learner and teacher support material, the Department of Education will receive a special allocation of R10.050 million during the 2009/10 financial year; R11.353 in 2010/11 and R6.876 million in 2011/12. The Department of Health will receive the medical goods and services special allocation of R55.917 million during 2009/10; R67.485 million in the 2010/11 and R40.871 million in the 2011/12 financial years.

## Policy priorities funded through the equitable share

Given the tight fiscal framework, adjustments will be made mainly for education and health. Further adjustments will also be made for roads infrastructure, housing and agriculture.

### Education

Madam Speaker, Honourable Members, our investment in education by far remains the highest. Currently Education receives a lion's share of our total budget, being 44.7 per cent.

Key funding priorities in education include:

- *Extending the no-fee schools policy to Quintile 3 schools:* Learners on quintile 3 schools will be exempt from paying school fees from the 2010-2011 financial year. An amount of R65.610 million has been provided for, during 2010-2011 and R81.831 million during 2011-2012 financial years to cater for this priority.
- *Reduction of Teacher-Learner Ratio:* An amount of R20.503 million has been provided for in the 2010-2011 and R147.295 million in the 2011-2012 financial years budget, to appoint more educators in order to reduce the teacher-learner ratio in quintile 1 schools.
- *Support of inclusive education:* A special allocation of R24.549 million will be added in the 2011-2012 budget, to increase the number of places available for learners with disabilities in both mainstream and special schools.

### Health Services

In order to ensure that the public health service continues to meet the health needs of society, the following currently funded priorities will be expanded:



- **Personnel costs and the OSD (Occupation Specific Dispensation) for nurses and doctors:** In order to address budget overruns for nursing OSD for three categories of health workers (nurses first, then doctors and specialists and then related professionals), R90.414 million has been set-aside in 2009-2010; R 90.214 million in 2010-2011 and R90.014 million in 2011-2012 financial years. For the phasing-in of the OSD for doctors and specialists, R41.097 million has been provided in the 2009-2010, R82.013 million in the 2010-2011 and R122.746 million in 2011-2012 financial years. However these funds will only be added to the baseline of the Department of Health after finalisation of guidelines by the National Department of Health, the National Treasury and the Department of Public Service and Administration.
- **Additional funding to fight Tuberculosis (TB):** Additional funding will be provided to fund teams to track down treatment defaulters (of extreme drug resistant and multi-drug resistant TB) and bring them back into treatment. The funding is also meant to strengthen TB programme teams at provincial and district office level for better programme management, support and monitoring. The following amounts are set aside for this purpose: R8.219 million in 2009-2010; R14.352 million in 2010-2011 and R15.793 million in 2011-2012.
- **Reduction of infant and child mortality rate:** Funding amounting to R32.878 million (2009/10); R 49.208 million (2010/11) and R65.464 million (2011/12) is budgeted to introduce three (3) new vaccines, which have proved effective in reducing the infant and child mortality rate.
- **General health capacity:** With regard to general health care, additional funding amounting to R 114.563 million is set aside in the 2011/12 financial year, to support various programmes intended to improve and support the rendering of primary health care services.

The Department of Health is allocated 24.1 per cent of the overall budget.

### **Social Development**

Funding amounting to R40.915 million has been set aside in the 2011/12 financial year for **Early Childhood Development**.

### **Roads Maintenance**

An amount of R40.915 million will be provided for in the 2011/12 financial year to cater for **provincial roads maintenance** and other economic functions.

### **Policy priorities funded through conditional grants**

Madam Speaker, Honourable Members, the baseline for conditional grants has been increased by six (6) per cent over the MTEF starting 2009-2010 financial year, to cover inflationary pressures. For the 2009-2010 financial year, an amount of R3.1 billion is made available; R3.3 billion in 2010-2011 and R3.9 billion in 2011-2012.

In order to ensure the provision of more classrooms for Grade R, additional funding amounting to R7.260 million is set aside in the 2010-2011, and R29.041 million in the 2011-2012 financial years.

The allocation on the **Infrastructure Grant** to the province is R771.968 million in 2009/10; R973.877 in 2010/11 and R1 billion, 126 million, and 770 thousand in 2011/12. The infrastructure allocation is made available in order to recapitalise schools which form part of the public school system, including upgrading school infrastructure, secure school facilities, increase maintenance and installation, purchase of new books and equipment in libraries and laboratories. Included in this allocations, are funds to support the rehabilitation and maintenance of the coal haulage routes in the province. For the 2009/10 financial year, R50 million is made available for this purpose; R100 million in 2010/11 and R120 million in 2011/12.

The **School Nutrition Programme** will receive additional funding to ensure that all quintile 1 to 3 primary school learners receive food every school day, and to further progressively expand the programme to secondary schools.

The **comprehensive HIV and Aids grant** will receive a boost over the MTEF, in order to meet the greater demands that arise due to the faster ARV take up rate.

The **Ilima/Letsema Campaign Grant** will receive R65 million over the MTEF to help farming communities falling within poor economic and disaster prone areas to achieve an increase of 10 to 15 per cent in agricultural production. In order to scale up food security, the Comprehensive Agricultural Support Programme Grant will increase by R70.892 million in 2009/10 financial year; R85.456 million in 2010/11 and R95.691 million in 2011/12.

An amount of R5.519 million is allocated to the overload control grant over the MTEF, to fund initiatives that support the preservation of road infrastructure by reducing overloading.

In order to accelerate the provision of houses, R795.447 million is provided in 2009/10; R975.863 million in 2010/11 and R1 billion, 184 million and 400 thousand in 2011/12 for the **Integrated Housing and Human Settlement Grant**.

Two (2) new conditional grants, namely the **Expanded Public Works Programme incentive grant** and the **public transport operations grant**, will be introduced from the 2009/2010 financial year.

The **EPWP incentive grant**, which is aimed incentivising provinces to create more jobs by meeting or exceeding the agreed targets, will be allocated R5.047 million; whereas the **Public Transport Operations grant** will receive R370.650 million.

The latter grant is aimed at improving monitoring and control of expenditure related to bus subsidies and other transport operations.

### **Infrastructure delivery**

Madam Speaker, the slow delivery of infrastructure in the province remains a worrying factor. The Department of Health continues to spend the **Hospital Revitalisation Grant** at a snail pace; the consequence of which became the withholding of the grant in terms of the Division of Revenue Act. Spending on this grant was at 28.28 per cent as at end of December 2008 and currently R153 million has been withheld by the National Department of Health. The slow maintenance of health facilities is also a worrying factor, and in order to speed it up, the Provincial Treasury and the Department of Public Works are closely working with the Department of Health to replace obsolete equipment under what we call, a quick win programme.

On the other hand, it is encouraging to see that infrastructure Departments have already submitted draft infrastructure plans for 2009/10 to the Provincial Treasury, as per the Division of Revenue Act requirements. We will work hard to assist these Departments, to conclude the key programme management documents before the beginning of the 2009/10 financial year, to allow early implementation of the projects. Departments are also encouraged to put projects under design on tender, and to further close those under retention.

Honourable Members will recall that we contracted what we call **Operational Support Teams** in November 2006, to assist Departments to improve infrastructure delivery. We are currently in the process of withdrawing this support, as their contract can not be extended to exceed three (3) calendar years, as per the Supply Chain Management Regulations. We are however working with these teams, to come up with an exit strategy which will ensure that Departments are sufficiently capacitated by the time they exit.

## ALLOCATIONS PER VOTE (DEPARTMENT)

Madam Speaker, Honourable Members, you will recall that we tabled the Main Budget of **R18 Billion, 739 Million, 619 thousand** on 04 March 2008, which was subsequently appropriated by this house. However due to the financial constraints caused by the current negative economic downturn, the budget we are proposing this afternoon, has only increased by a moderate of **20.3 percent or R3 billion, 805 million, 835 thousand**.

I now have the honour to table the proposed budget for the 2009-2010 financial year to the house, as mandated by **Chapter 13 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act 108 of 1996**; and **Chapter 4, Sections 26 and 27 of the Public Finance Management Act, Act 1 of 1999, as amended by Act 29 of 1999**, per vote:

### **VOTE 1: Office of the Premier**

It is proposed that the Office of the Premier receive a total amount of **R196.689 million** to amongst others, fund the marketing and branding of the Province; to ensure corporate compliance; to fund provincial priorities, namely the Executive Accelerated Capacity Development Programmes; and for 2010 World Cup co-ordination.

### **VOTE 2: Mpumalanga Provincial Legislature**

The Provincial Legislature is proposed to receive a total amount of **R158.838 million** to amongst others, continue with their oversight role, public participation and education programmes and law making.

### **VOTE 3: Department of Finance**

The Department of Finance will receive a budget totalling **R236.397 million** to amongst others, ensure efficient allocation of resources; prudent financial management; to render advice and support to provincial departments and municipalities for enhanced service delivery.

**VOTE 4: Local Government**

The Department of Local Government will receive the proposed amount totalling **R414.775 million** to amongst others, fund the implementation of the Mpumalanga Traditional Leadership and Governance Act No. 5 of 2006; construction of the Disaster Management Centre; and Community Development Workers.

**VOTE 5: Agriculture and Land Administration**

It is proposed that the Department of Agriculture and Land Administration receives a total amount of **R799.635 million** to amongst others, fund the Comprehensive Agricultural Support Programme; *Masibuyel' Emasimini*; and other value adding projects.

**VOTE 6: Economic Development and Planning**

The Department of Economic Development and Planning will receive the proposed total amount of **R490.443 million** to amongst others; fund the provincial ICT (Information Communication and Technology) Strategy; the Small Medium and Micro Enterprise Strategy; and the identification of business linkages for Project Kusile.

**VOTE 7: Education**

The amount totalling **R10.073 billion** is proposed to be allocated to the Department of Education to cater for amongst others, the appointment of additional educators to reduce the teacher-learner ratio; to ensure greater access to places of education by increasing the number of places for learners with disabilities.

**VOTE 8: Public Works**

It is proposed that the Department of Public Works receive a total amount of **R476.899 million** to amongst others, fund the Expanded Public Works Programme; to fund the implementation of Government-wide Immovable Asset Management Act; and to finalise the development of own and shared building maintenance plan.

**VOTE 9: Safety and Security**

The Department of Safety and Security will receive the proposed total amount of **R90.415 million** to amongst others, cater for the integration of municipal safety plans with departmental plans; the assessment of the impact of departmental programmes on communities; and to fund Community Policing Fora.

**VOTE 10: Health**

The amount totalling **R5.429 billion** is proposed to be allocated to the Department of Health to cater for amongst others, the reduction of infant and child mortality rates; funding for teams to track TB treatment defaulters; and to improve and support the rendering of primary health care services.

**VOTE 11: Roads and Transport**

The Department of Roads and Transport will receive the proposed total amount of **R2.139 billion** to amongst others, fund the construction and maintenance of provincial roads infrastructure; the promotion of improved safety on the public transport system; and the implementation of the National Road Traffic Act, Act 93 of 1996, as well as the coal haulage routes.

**VOTE 12: Culture, Sport and Recreation**

In order to cater for the provision of libraries, cultural and archive infrastructure; acceleration of sport and school sport mass participation, the Department of Culture, Sport and Recreation is proposed to be allocated a total amount of **R278.696 million**.

**VOTE 13: Social Development**

The Department of Social Development is proposed to receive a total amount of **R792.343 million** to amongst others, fund social welfare services, development and research.

#### **VOTE 14: Housing**

The amount totalling **R968.727 million** is proposed to be allocated to the Department of Housing to cater for amongst others, the building of houses in terms of the Breaking New Ground Strategy.

#### **TOTAL PROPOSED BUDGET: 2009-2010**

The total budget proposed to be appropriated by this house for the 2009-2010 financial-year; to fund the requirements of the Province is **R22 Billion, 586 Million, 551 thousand**.

#### **TABLING OF THE BILL AND THE OTHER BUDGET DOCUMENTATION**

Madam Speaker, I now have the honour of tabling the Mpumalanga Appropriation Bill – 2009; the 2009 Estimates of Provincial Expenditure; the 2009 Provincial Budget Speech; and the 2009 Budget Made-Easy booklet in terms of **Chapter 4, Section 27, sub-Section 3 of the PFMA, Act 1 of 1999, as amended by Act 29 of 1999**.

#### **CONCLUSION**

Madam Speaker, Honourable Members, the road ahead might be thorny and steep, but as optimists, we know that *there's always sunshine after a storm*. As we prepare for the sunshine, we must work together as government, civil society and the private sector, to rebuild our economy in order to create more job opportunities, and ensure a better life for all our people. There is no doubt that the budget we are proposing to this august house this afternoon, will go a long way in addressing priority areas determined by our caring government. We have improved the lives of our people in the past 15 years, and commit to even do more through this budget and beyond.

As I conclude Madam Speaker, allow me to pass my extreme appreciation to the African National Congress and the people of Mpumalanga, for having given me an opportunity to represent them since 1994 – as a Member of Parliament; Chief Whip of the Provincial Legislature; MEC for Local Government and Housing; MEC for Culture, Sport and Recreation; and currently as MEC for Finance. It has been an honour to be given such challenges by the ANC and the people of our Province, which were aimed at fulfilling our quest to provide a better life for all.

My appreciation also goes to the Honourable Premier, Mr TSP Makwetla, for his leadership and guidance in our work over the term of office of the current administration. My high regard further goes to colleagues in the Executive Council, who continue to support and give me strength to carry-out my mandate with zoom, zeal and zest.

To the Members of the Budget and Finance Committee under the leadership of the Honourable Premier, thank you for continuing to shape the provincial fiscal stance. I also would like to thank members of the Portfolio Committee on Premier's Office, Finance and Safety and Security under the chairpersonship of Honourable N.S Mtsweni, for their leadership and continuing guidance. Tributes further go to all Members of the Legislature, for your oversight role and engagements over the past five years of the current administration.

To the Head of the Department of Finance, Mr Rabeng Tshukudu and his team, thank you for managing our provincial coffers and ensuring compliance with financial prescripts. My gratitude also goes to the support staff in my office under the capable stewardship of Mr Sarel Mtsweni, who continues to make my work easy. To my wife and children, I appreciate your perseverance and understanding that I am a servant of our people. To our esteemed guests and the members of the media - your presence is highly appreciated, and thanks for showing interest in your future.



Madam Speaker, Honourable Members, in the words of President Motlanthe, indeed,  
*“Ours is a journey of hope and resilience!”*

I leave you with an inspiring quotation by American writer and motivator, Grenville Kleiser, who said and I quote:

*“Be grateful for the joy of life. Be glad for the privilege of work. Be thankful for the opportunity to give and serve. Good work is the great character-builder, the sweetener of life, the maker of destiny. Let the spirit of your work be right, and whether your task be great or small, you will then have the satisfaction of knowing, it is worth while”.*

*Ngiyathokoza!*