

# Nxesi targeted over past corruption

**WYNDHAM HARTLEY**  
Parliamentary Editor

CAPE TOWN — Despite arguably starting to make a difference at the dysfunctional Department of Public Works, the minister responsible, Thulas Nxesi, took a drubbing from opposition parties yesterday for his department's history of corruption and mismanagement.

The scandals of the R206m security upgrade to President Jacob Zuma's private residence and the controversial spending of more than R500m on luxury upgrades to ministerial mansions were hurled across the floor of the National Assembly as opposition MPs demanded explanations.

Delivering his budget vote speech in an extended public committee of the National Assembly, Mr Nxesi candidly confessed that "the department's past performance has been characterised by corruption and mismanagement, evidenced by eight years of qualified audits, and disclaimers in the

past two financial years".

But this did not stop the criticism. Clearly angry, Freedom Front MP Pieter Groenewald said he could not understand why Mr Nxesi was being treated so kindly. He charged that the spending on Mr Zuma's home could not be considered secret, nor was it a national key point.

Taxpayers' money was being pillaged by officials at public works and the minister had a duty to come clean about the details, Mr Groenewald said.

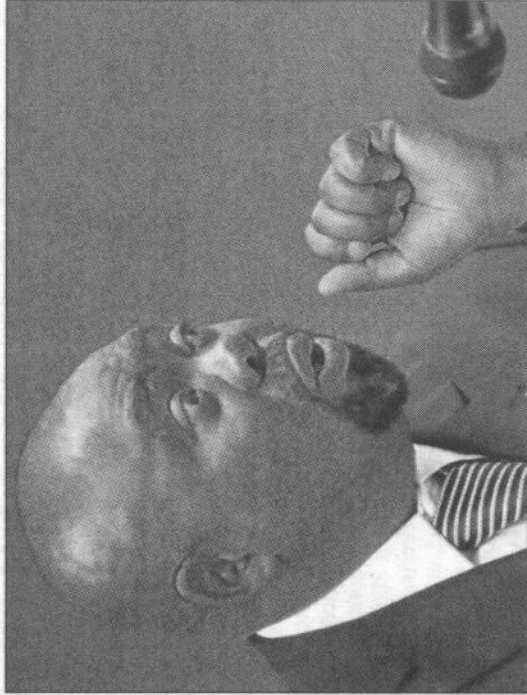
Democratic Alliance MP Anchen Dreyer reminded Mr Nxesi that his department had lost more than R20m of rental income by not keeping proper records of its lease agreements; that its failure to pay rent had seen government departments evicted from the buildings they had hired; that thousands of officials were not qualified to do their jobs, resulting in massive spending on consultants; and that last year, nearly 100 officials were found guilty of offences.

"In 2013, R532m was allocated over the medium term to the prestige portfolio, to add luxuries such as swimming pools, braai areas, guest cottages and spas, for ministers. It was clear that ministers' own comfort was far more important than service delivery to the people; they felt nothing for the voters," Ms Dreyer said.

African Christian Democratic Party MP Steve Swart, while complimenting Mr Nxesi on the steps he has taken since coming to office, demanded to know how the situation at public works had been allowed to deteriorate so far.

Mr Nxesi said: "The root causes of this deteriorating situation can be attributed to a lack of controls in supply chain management practices, poor lease management, lack of accountability of our regional offices, lack of an appropriate accounting platform for the property management trading entity, as well as the nonexistence of a reliable immovable asset register."

"The issues and challenges fac-



**CANDID: Thulas Nxesi confessed that the department's performance has been characterised by mismanagement.** Picture: SUNDAY WORLD

ing the (department) are not new. They have been well-publicised and several prior attempts have been made over the past 10 years to remedy the obvious defects.

Despite some good work, little traction was gained in a large organisation, where all too often there is misalignment between the mandate and the structure of the organisation."

hartleyw@bdfm.co.za