

Politics & Society

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ANC's jobs opportunities vow 'will cost R152bn'

SETUMO STONE
Political Correspondent

THE African National Congress's (ANC's) May 7 election promise of 6-million work opportunities over the next five years is expected to cost up to R152bn, the Department of Public Works said yesterday.

The ANC's jobs commitment hinges on the performance of this department, which Parliament's standing committee on public accounts (Scopa) has described as "chaotic". Further, the committee has accused the department of

apparent and wilful financial misconduct in connection with its role in the Nkandla saga.

"Nkandla is just the tip of the iceberg in terms of the rot in public works," outgoing Scopa chairman Themba Godi, also leader of the opposition African People's Convention, said this week in an interview.

He was referring the R246m spent on President Jacob Zuma's private residence.

Public Protector Thuli Madonsela found Mr Zuma to have unduly benefited from this spending. Further, she found former public works

minister Gwen Mahlangu-Nkabinde guilty of maladministration.

Ms Mahlangu-Nkabinde replaced Geoff Doidge in 2010, but was axed in a Cabinet reshuffle in 2011 and replaced by the incumbent minister, Thulas Nxesi.

The department's deputy director-general, Stanley Henderson, said yesterday that the budget to create work opportunities was not allocated to public works. It was part of the existing budgets of municipalities and other national and provincial departments.

The role of the department was to

co-ordinate the jobs programme. It had to ensure that other lead departments, including health, education and transport, reach their targets.

Work opportunities is the term the government uses to describe the part-time jobs it creates through the expanded public works programme (EPWP), a flagship project of the Department of Public Works. This programme employs people on a temporary basis often to do menial work such as street sweeping and the cutting of road verges.

Public works, with the biggest property portfolio in the country,

manages the government's accommodation requirements and gives advice on the acquisition, maintenance and disposal of assets among other things. Further, it plays an important role in job creation and skills development, including through the EPWP.

Mr Henderson said a focus on maintenance jobs in client departments, including in provinces, was likely to deliver the 6-million work opportunities — revving up from 4-million in the last five years.

Mr Godi said the department needed proper political and

administrative leadership. Several ministers had come and gone, and the department had the highest number of senior managers in acting posts. "The executive and Parliament dropped the ball" in allowing public works, reconfigured as a new department in 1994, to deteriorate over the time, Mr Godi said.

Deputy Public Works Minister Jeremy Cronin said the appointment of Mr Nxesi as the political head in October 2011 had brought "significant progress" towards turning the department around.

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