

Bloated cabinet costs taxpayers

THE bloated cabinet of former president Jacob Zuma continues to live on despite President Cyril Ramaphosa's pledge to address government excesses, including giving due consideration to downsizing his cabinet, the DA said.

"This cabinet is by far one of the biggest in the world with 35 ministers, far bigger than the United States at 15 ministers, Kenya with 18 ministers and the United Kingdom with 21 ministers," DA spokesperson Desiree van der Walt said.

This year alone, the 35 ministers and 37 deputy ministers would earn R163.5 million and over R510.5m over the medium term. Further, the ministerial handbook recommended that ministers' and deputy ministers' private offices be limited to 10 and six staff respectively, but in many cases these numbers had been exceeded considerably.

In total this year, all private offices would cost a whopping R1.09 billion and R3.485bn over the medium term, she said. Regarding ministerial residences, the Public Works Department had spent over R188m on acquiring just 33 properties in Pretoria and Cape Town at an average of R5.7m a residence.

It was revealed last year that an additional R48m would be spent on

acquiring six additional residences at an average of R8m each in the 2017/18 financial year. The total of R236m spent on acquiring 39 ministerial houses could have been spent on building nearly 2 000 RDP houses.

Among other things, this year the taxpayer was set to spend R296.9m on travel and subsistence for ministries and R934m over the medium term. Minis-

tries were set to spend R5.7m on "entertainment" over the medium term and R1.8m in this year, Van der Walt said.

Ministers were provided with VIP security services in the police's budget programme, including security at their ministerial residences. The total budget for VIP protection over the medium term stood at R4.84bn (including protection for the president, ministers and other VIPs) and R1.5bn in 2018/19.

"Simply put, the country's current cabinet is not fit for purpose and needs to be cut. We don't have to look abroad for a more frugal cabinet: previous presidents had smaller cabinets... Nelson Mandela – total cabinet size 50 (28 ministers), Thabo Mbeki – total cabinet size 50 (28 ministers), Kgalema Motlanthe – total cabinet size 47 (28 ministers), Jacob Zuma/Cyril Ramaphosa – total cabinet size 73 (35 ministers)."

The handbook was extraordinarily lenient in some respects, Van der Walt said, allowing for excessive spending.

Ministers had therefore used the handbook as an excuse for exorbitant spending, which could not be justified given the current levels of inequality, and it needed to be reviewed. – African News Agency (ANA)

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