

# MPs lose their seats, but hold on to houses

## De Lille gets tough with those who are refusing to move

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● Parliament is splurging R76m on “loss-of-office gratuities” for MPs who failed to make a comeback after the elections, but some of them are refusing to vacate state-allocated houses despite the added sweetener.

The splurge on “gratuities” to MPs who did not return to parliament after the May 8 election was confirmed by Joe Nkuna, the acting chief financial officer, who told a meeting that was discussing parliament’s finances that the legislature had so far forked out R76m of taxpayers’ money to top up the retirement packages of exiting MPs.

He was responding to a question from DA MP John Steenhuisen.

The amount is expected to keep rising in coming weeks as payments are still being processed. All former ministers and MPs who completed at least a five-year term in office qualify for the benefit, which amounts to four months’ pensionable salary for every five years of service completed.

Former ministers such as Jeff Radebe and Derek Hanekom, who have been in parliament since 1994, stand to pocket at least R4.8m each, given their ministerial salaries of about R208,000 a month at the



**Patricia de Lille: ‘Change the locks’.**

time of their retirement.

The gratuity has been criticised as an unnecessary and expensive benefit. While it was initially proposed as a loss-of-office benefit, some of the former MPs who received it ended up taking up other plum positions in the public sector or even returned to parliament a few years later.

Steenhuisen on Friday said given the dwindling public purse, it was time to reconsider the gratuity, which was gazetted in 2008.

“What was originally intended as an amount to help get you back on your feet after leaving parliament has now turned into a R1m-plus cash bonanza for many members,” he said.

Meanwhile, some of the former MPs due this generous sweetener had to be forcibly removed from their houses in parliamentary villages after defying a notice to vacate the properties by June 30. Parliament has spent at least R1m to put new MPs up in pricey hotels for up to two weeks due to exiting MPs’ refusal to vacate the houses.

Public works minister Patricia de Lille told the Sunday Times that her department and parliament had to dispatch a team of officials to parliamentary villages to get former MPs out of the homes.

“Two weeks after the notice date, they refused to give the keys. We’ll get blamed when people stay longer in hotels. I said to them, let’s act, we’ve got 15 people to help us from parliament, you go pack their personal stuff into boxes, you seal them, put them in a safe space and change the locks.

“If any of them had contacted me I would have told them that you’re ignoring us and there are [new] MPs waiting for houses. It’s ill-discipline and it’s really embarrassing,” De Lille said.

Former MPs have 30 days after the start of the new parliament to vacate their houses.

Pemmy Majodina, the chief whip of the ANC, said they spent last weekend moving from “park to park”, evicting 23 former MPs who are illegally occupying state houses.

Majodina said some of the MPs pleaded for extensions, arguing that their children were in the middle of a school year in Cape Town. At one house, however, the “child” a former MP had pleaded about in order to win a stay of eviction turned out to be a grown man with a wife and his own child, Majodina said.