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More perks for SA ministers

BLOOD OUT OF A STONE: TAXPAYERS LIABLE FOR WATER, ELECTRICITY OF CABINET MEMBERS

⇒ Consumers urged 'to continue to pay for the services they receive'.

Lunga Simelane

Cabinet ministers are given a number of perks on top of multi-million rand salaries annually.

Free internet and DSTv for "official purposes", moving costs for up to two state-owned residences, free flights, train travel, airport VIP lounges, subsistence and travel allowances are among the many benefits ministers have at their disposal.

In the latest amendment to the 2022 Ministerial Handbook, they are now also allowed free water and electricity at their official residences after President Cyril Ramaphosa in April scrapped a R5 000 limit on the amount they may claim for water and power.

Government spokesperson Phumla Williams said the department of public works and infrastructure was responsible for the costs of water and electricity to any state-owned residence which was bound by government prescriptions to accommodate members of the executive.

"Government urges consumers to continue to pay for the services they receive so that municipalities are able to collect revenue, meet their debt obligations and provide quality services to communities," Williams said.

Earlier this year, Ramaphosa's annual salary and benefits increased from R2.99 million to R3.08 million; the salary for Deputy President David Mabuza went to R2.91 million from R2.83 million, with Speaker of the National Assembly Nosiviwe Mapisa-Nqakula also earning R2.91 million.

Ministers' salaries were upped to R2.47 million annually,



JUNGLE IN THERE

Police and Prisons Civil Rights Union members picket outside the Pollsmoor prison department of correctional services in Cape Town yesterday. The picket is to raise issues around the lack of adequate security at correctional centres. Picture: Gallo Images

with deputy ministers earning R2.04 million.

As the leader of the official opposition, the Democratic Alliance (DA), John Steenhuisen's salary went to R1.65 million from R1.6 million.

Parliament spokesperson Moloto Mothapo said "because of the prevailing and difficult economic conditions", the three percent increase was not "tone deaf" and globally their salaries were no higher than "those of countries with similar GDP [gross domestic product] and population".

Except, as *The Citizen* reported in July, parliament benchmarked salaries, not against those of countries in a similar financial bracket as SA, but those of the world's biggest economies like the UK, US, Australia and Germany.

Chief economist at Efficient Group Dawie Roodt said the money spent on ministers and MPs was an important issue which had to be resolved.

Roodt said the size of the Cabinet was bloated, it was highly inefficient and incompetent.

"The message our political leaders are sending is, despite everybody going through an extremely difficult time in this country, they simply do not care and give themselves these totally unrealistic increases and remuneration, especially Cabinet," he said.

"The ones, who should be blamed for many of the woes we are going through, are getting these completely and unrealistic salary increases and benefits.

"The message being sent is of politicians who are highly in-

sensitive and simply do not care about the people in SA."

Roodt said a better approach by Ramaphosa would be to cut the Cabinet by half or three-quarters and consolidate departments.

"Force ministers to buy either locally manufactured cars or smaller ones. With small things like DSTv, those are symbolic things he could cut and make it known they are really trying to take some of the pain the country is going through."

Congress of South African Trade Unions spokesperson Sizwe Pamla said the union was shocked by reports which showed taxpayers paid for water and electricity used by Cabinet members.

"This is shameful and scandalous, considering millions of poor people are struggling with the es-

calating cost of living," he said.

"More than 16 million South Africans struggle to have three meals a day and 22 million are on social welfare.

"The same politicians who are being cushioned from the cost of living are persisting with ineffectual neoliberal policies."

Pamla said the federation was calling for the scrapping of these "vulgar and tone-deaf" perks and for an overhaul of the ministerial handbook which was out of touch with reality.

DA shadow minister for public service and administration Dr Leon Schreiber said the party would be filing a complaint with the public protector calling for the abolition of the handbook in its entirety. - lungas@citizen.co.za

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