

State's dismal track record shows NHI will be a costly failure – Business Day 5 September 2019

The governing ANC has damaged all SOEs and thus cannot be given any shiny new toys until it demonstrates it can look after the ones it has

An effective challenge for people who compulsively buy new books is to only allow themselves to buy a new one for every three they read. I believe this principle should be applied to the ANC government as well. From SAA to Eskom, the Post Office, the SABC and public education the government has demonstrated a consistent inverted Midas touch when it comes to running state-owned enterprises (SOEs).

If we are to continue down this big government/big spending path — which I cannot see being abandoned in the near future — the least South Africans can do is demand of the state that it demonstrate a clear ability to look after its toys before it is given any expensive new ones.

With the ANC's dismal track record, I think this is a perfectly reasonable demand from taxpayers. Until the ANC practises what it preaches and delivers what it promises, South Africans should refuse to fund any further expensive schemes. That includes National Health Insurance (NHI), the only goal of which appears to be further centralisation of power and control in the hands of the governing elite, thus furthering the “national democratic revolution”.

President Cyril Ramaphosa has insisted that “we want to run a clean ship in our NHI fund”. If that were to come to pass, it would be the first clean ANC ship in the entire fleet.

The ANC should not be given a mandate to explore further risky health-care ventures if it is unable to demonstrate its ability to run state hospitals effectively. This test would force it to consider alternative paths to achieving the same goals.

The single principal contributing factor enabling wider access to private health care remains a nation's level of per capita income. Therefore, the logical alternative path to increase access to private health care across society should be one focused on economic growth, accompanied by a reduced individual tax burden.

Experience has shown that a monopolistic system such as the NHI is inherently weak and inefficient by design, suffering from the typical problems associated with such uncompetitive systems — increasing costs, declining quality, inefficient resource allocation and an unmanageable bureaucracy. Adding insult to injury, the ANC NHI is guaranteed to provide a much weaker and exorbitantly more expensive health system, while expecting already overburdened taxpayers to sponsor it.

The crux of the problem is that the ANC government is terrible at managing and executing even well-designed programmes and systems. Fundamentally, South Africans have been conditioned for almost a century to believe they need a big government to solve all their problems. Perhaps the time has come to question the narrative of the paternal state and an infantilised citizenry.

Politicians and bureaucrats got us into this dependent and helpless situation, and South Africans need to consider whether the time has come to either democratically show the ANC the door or, alternatively, roll up our sleeves and slowly but surely take our destiny into our own hands on this sinking ship.

The obvious solution of good governance and economic growth is in the hands of the ANC. But, if the Titanic does not change course, let us start solving our own problems by building small life rafts, one step at a time. From neighbourhoods coming together to organise community safety networks to AfriForum fixing potholes and painting street signs, to communities getting involved in providing basic health services — we must improve our chances of survival while we wait for a political miracle to happen.

The time has come for taxpaying South Africans to take a stand against the NHI by publicly demanding that the ANC stop milking them dry to fund any further public spending experiments in which the citizenry are the guinea pigs.

It is a universal truth that you must crawl before you can walk, and walk before you can run. The ANC has, up to now, demonstrated no crawling ability, yet it expects us to pay for the most expensive new NHI running shoes in the world.

- *Van Zyl is a campaign officer for strategy and content at AfriForum*