

Ramaphosa's 'new dawn' has turned into a 'new despair' –

Despatch News 18 February 2020

DA interim leader John Steenhuisen launched a blistering attack on President Cyril Ramaphosa on Tuesday afternoon, saying his time in government had moved from “a new dawn” to a “new despair”.

Speaking in parliament during a debate on Ramaphosa's state of the nation address (Sona), Steenhuisen said Ramaphosa “blew” the many chances he has had to inspire the nation since he became president in 2018, and after being re-elected in 2019.

Steenhuisen said that since Ramaphosa has occupied the highest office in the land, more and more communities were running out of basic services such as water. He also slated the return of load-shedding by Eskom on Ramaphosa's watch, adding that more than a million people have lost their jobs during the president's term of office.

“I am not going to stand here and say that this happened on your watch, Mr President. That would be far too kind. It didn't just happen on your watch, it happened by your own hand. You, sir, put us in this situation. You had your chance to fix it — and you blew it.

“You are not the reformer South Africa thought you were. You don't have the guts to make the tough choices our country needs. You are not brave enough to take on the unions that hold this country to ransom.”

Steenhuisen said Ramaphosa had opted to put the interests of his own party, the ANC, ahead of those of the country.

The former DA chief whip also accused Ramaphosa of failing to deal decisively with corruption.

“While you were telling us on Thursday night how you've fought back against corruption, you had people like [corruption-accused former eThekweni mayor] Zandile Gumede with you in the house,” he said.

“While you were telling us how you've acted decisively against state capture, the beneficiaries of state capture — some of them chairs of portfolio committees — sat in these very benches.

“And while the country waits with bated breath for the long-promised arrests to be made, we have to learn in a document sent from parliament to the committee on public service that there will be no arrests, prosecutions or orange overalls this year.

“That's why instead of a new dawn, there's a new despair.”

Steenhuisen said while his party welcomed Ramaphosa's plans to help Eskom do away with load-shedding, they did not support the proposed National Health Insurance (NHI) scheme.

He said the public purse was not in a position to afford the R280bn required for the rollout of the NHI without an increase in taxes.

Steenhuisen also slammed Ramaphosa's proposed establishment of a sovereign wealth fund. “We are running a budget deficit and spiralling deeper and deeper into debt. Where will the money for a sovereign wealth fund come from, Mr President? From your own bank account?”

“Talking of banks. On Thursday night you announced the creation of a state bank. The trouble is that we already have two state banks — the Land Bank and the Post Bank — and both of them are bankrupt and riddled with corruption.”