

To pursue NHI is to secure human dignity for the majority – Bandile Masuku – Politicsweb 1 March 2020

State of the Province Address Debate Speech by MEC Bandile Masuku

28 February 2020

Honourable Speaker and Deputy Speaker,

Honourable Premier,

Members of the Executive,

Members of the Provincial Legislature,

Distinguished guests, comrades and friends.

Life is of equal worth and the NHI restores human dignity

We wish to agree with the Honourable Premier that **‘access to healthcare is an important measure of human development’**; and therefore, important for inclusive economic growth.

This fact is borne out by recent research conducted by among others, Dr Adrian Saville who sought to understand the basic question: **What are the factors that are common**

to countries that achieve and sustain high rates of growth? They found that six factors are critical to sustain high rates of growth and ‘healthcare’ is one of them. They also found, quite astonishingly, that **‘healthcare carries greater weight than education’**.

This is a study conducted over 10 years, on 160 countries, over six decades and it includes countries as diverse as Costa Rica, Chile, Estonia, South Korea, Poland, Taiwan and others.

We are citing the extent of the data and the name of the researcher in case those who stand opposed to us, doubt as they must, that there is a scientific method to our selection of Strategic Priorities.

Madame Speaker, the facts produced by this research affirm the self-evident truth that health is good for economic growth and serves as a great measure for human development!

Today we are not standing up to seek approval or affirmation from those who stand opposed to the ideal of a free, just and equal society. We are merely reminding them of the self-evident truth that **stable and peaceful societies are those with higher levels of equality and low poverty rates**.

The vision and plan for **Growing Gauteng Together** leading up to 2030, is the only vision that offers hope to the people of Gauteng. As Government, we are ready, committed and capable to realise the strategic goals of the new decade in Gauteng.

Madame Speaker, the introduction of the National Health Insurance (NHI) aligns with the new vision of Growing Gauteng Together with our people. As an equaliser, the NHI will ensure that we have sufficient funding to improve healthcare outcomes in a manner that reaffirms the self-evident truth that life is of equal worth and that quality healthcare restores human dignity.

We stand up not to seek approval or affirmation from those who are blinded by sins of privilege and the tormenting conscience of history. We are merely reminding our people that we are one country and have a shared destiny. We must overcome the divisions and inequality of our past that inhibit growth and human development. The unjust status quo where more than half of the 8.5 per cent of GDP (4.4 per cent) spent on health goes to 16 per cent of the population; and the rest goes to the 84 per cent which is made up of the working class and the poor, must be changed. For this reason, we will build one health system for all and realise the rights envisioned in Section 27 of our Constitution.

Madame Speaker, Gauteng is not only a space where the stakes are high in terms of the conception and implementation of the NHI. It is also a space that is more ideal to pioneer many of the proposed provisions of the NHI Bill.

As part of turning Gauteng Health around, as the Honourable Premier noted in the SOPA, we have increased the number of facilities that are ideal for NHI, we are near completion in terms of filling vacant critical posts, we are rolling out upgrades on the 10 priority hospitals, we are improving Occupational Health and Safety, we are finding alternative sources of funding to build new infrastructure, we are improving EMS services, we are reaching our targets on the 90-90-90 principles, we are improving clinical governance, we are modernising our processes and systems, we are getting leadership and administration right; all of which will improve staff morale and patients' experience of care.

Madame Speaker, we are not standing up to please or seek approval from those who stand opposed to the ideal of Growing Gauteng. We are merely reminding our people of the commitments we have made to build a better Gauteng, South Africa and Africa through quality healthcare for our people. As research shows, there is a strong relationship between Growth, Healthcare and Human Development.

We must complete the puzzle and the ingredients that will make a uniquely South African model of universal health coverage successful. We have abundant human capital, we have the capacity to revitalise old infrastructure and build new ones and now, through the NHI, the puzzle will be complete as we recapitalise healthcare funding in a manner that affirms the principle that life is of equal worth and to pursue NHI is to secure human dignity for the vast majority.

The international community, both the North and the South, is embracing universal health coverage as a norm. The NHI is the single most important and revolutionary public policy reform since 1994. It is a source of unity and not division. It aims to bridge the age-old social divides that have always characterised our society. The feeble and mindless opposition to the principle, should not blind us to the fact that we are bound by one humanity, one geography and one destiny. The NHI is another building block to a non-racial, non-sexist, prosperous, united democratic society of our dreams since 1994.

Madame Speaker, I wish to repeat, we are not standing up to ask for permission from those who stand opposed to the Gauteng of our dreams. We are merely standing up to echo the sentiments of the people of Gauteng who voted with their feet during the NHI Public Hearings a few days ago. Do not be misled by the noisy airwaves and rented opinions, the people of Gauteng are unanimous: they want better healthcare services and outcomes and they chose the NHI. As the ANC-led government we have always known the self-evident truth that the people of South Africa want universal health coverage NOW: they voted for it in the last General Elections.

In this year of the Nurse and Midwifery which coincides with the 30 years of the release of President Mandela, uMadiba omde, uYem-Yem, uZondwa, uSophitsho, uNgqolomsila, uvela bembhentsele, it is important to recall his inspiration and instructive words about health and opportunity:

'I have cherished the idea of a democratic and free society in which all persons will live together in harmony and with equal opportunities.' Later on, Madiba cemented his status as the first champion of the NHI when he said: **'Health cannot be a question of income, it is a fundamental human right.'**

Madame Speaker, we are merely standing up to re-affirm the self-evident truth engraved in the hearts and minds of our people that life is of equal worth and universal health coverage is human dignity. No matter the differences on nuances and approaches, the principles of the NHI bind us all and we shall experience universal health coverage in our lifetime, and nothing shall stop us!

As the ANC, we welcome the State of the Province Address as a true reflection of our reality, hopes and aspirations of our people and a call to action!

I thank you.

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