

NOT THE FREE STATE POST

February 2015



BENNY FIRED!

**INCOMPETENT FREE STATE
HEALTH MEC DISMISSED!**

Benny fired!

Incompetent MEC of Health dismissed in Free State

Today during his State of the Nation address, the President announced the dismissal of “incompetent” MEC of Health Dr Benny Malakoane. The announcement came amid reports of severe health system collapse in the Free State including devastating medicine stockouts and staff shortages that are threatening the lives of many people across the province.

The President explained that the government would no longer stand for MECs like Malakoane who merely “played to the political gallery”. “MECs must fulfil the requirements of their job or they will face dismissal. Health is not a political game to be played. The lives of the people, the people we claim to represent, are at stake.”

“Dr Benny Malakoane was fired because he was found to be incapable of performing his duties. Dr Benny Malakoane was fired because he is on trial for a number of cases of corruption. Dr Benny Malakoane was fired because never did he work in the public interest,” the President continued.

Patient groups and health professionals rejoiced at the decision that they said was “the first step in ensuring the urgent turnaround needed to fix the Free State healthcare system”.

66 year-old Nokuzola Xaba, a community healthcare worker in Free State said, “I can’t believe it. I just can’t. The health situation here in the Free State is terrible and has been getting worse every day. People aren’t getting the treatment or care they need. People are receiving healthcare in undignified ways. People are dying unnecessarily. I only hope to God that the next MEC can fix all this. But for the first time in long time, at least I feel hope.”

In recent months, reports of victimisation and intimidation of health professionals and activists who spoke out against the Former MEC have abounded. A spokesperson from the Treatment Action Campaign described it as “a general atmosphere



of fear to speak out about problems in the province’s healthcare system”.

“The trial of the 129 community healthcare workers arrested for attending a peaceful night vigil” they continued “was a punishment not for breaking the law but for having publicly dared to challenge the former MEC of Health, Dr Benny Malakoane.” The president made specific mention of this case and apologised on behalf of the government to the 129. Shortly after the President’s speech the National Prosecuting Authority announced that all charges against the community healthcare workers are being dropped.

The President also apologised for not reacting sooner to the “absurd situation where an MEC facing multiple charges of corruption, with no de-

monstrable skills or commitment for the job, was able to continue running the increasingly collapsing health system in the Free State. He warned that especially MECs of Health in Mpumalanga, Limpopo, Gauteng, and the Eastern Cape should tread warily and that “the time of no accountability is over”.

High-ranking sources inside the ANC say the move is part of Luthuli House’s crackdown on “supposed untouchable” provincial leaders who are failing both the party and the people.

When contacted former MEC Benny Malakoane appeared not to be aware of the President’s announcement. “Crisis in the healthcare system, what crisis?” he said. “If the president thinks he can fire me, he should think again.”

Hope on the horizon!

Leaked documents show Premier's urgent plan to fix health crisis

Confidential documents leaked from the office of the Free State Premier, Ace Magashule, set out detailed plans to overhaul the healthcare system in the Free State. Following former MEC Dr Benny Malakoane's public dismissal, the Premier has ordered the immediate implementation of these plans when the new MEC of Health takes office.

"The Premier has made sure this is a priority for the incoming MEC and the provincial health department. He won't allow another 'Benny situation' – as he calls it – to arise," explained a source from the office of the Premier. "He has made it very clear that he is serious about instigating urgent change in the healthcare system in the province."

The plan outlines a series of urgent changes that will be made within the Free State Department of Health to stop overspending and forced cuts in service delivery going forward. The Premier orders vast improvements in financial management practices as one measure. The document accuses senior management at the health department of "pre-occupation with bureaucracy rather than implementing effective service delivery that must, and will going forward, be the core of their responsibility." The source said that the Premier was "tired of dealing with 'yes men' like Benny who never actually get the work done". According to the source the plan was developed with the help of a committee of highly regarded experts and activists with experience from other provinces.

The Free State health system has

been facing significant challenges for several years. According to a spokesperson at the Treatment Action Campaign the situation is critical. "We are witnessing a crisis. There are widespread stockouts of medicines. Often equipment is missing or broken. Vacancy rates at clinics and hospitals are unacceptably high – in some case there are no doctors at all. No water, no electricity, no toilets is a daily occurrence. Ambulances take hours to arrive, if they arrive at all – and at the end it is the people of Free State who suffer".

It was reported last year in June that the provincial depot was out of "at least 11 antiretroviral medicines, paracetamol, surgical gloves and masks, surgical blades, needles, surgical gauze swabs, viral load and CD4 test kits and antibiotics". They went on to report that "one list had 23 items out of stock and the other 182".

The deterioration of the health system began back in 2008 when over expenditure lead to health services being scaled back in the province. In particular a decision was taken to stop starting new patients on AIDS treatment that according to experts had dire consequences for people's health in the more than four months that it was in place. A further financial crisis last year meant the provincial Department of Health's finances were finally taken over by the provincial treasury.

Reports from individuals accessing services in the Free State confirm this situation. "Quite honestly, the situation is awful. At my clinic we have no



water at all! We have to carry water in buckets from taps in the community," reported one anonymous individual.

Another stated, "My aunt was extremely ill. Doctors wanted to do an x-ray for TB before giving her treatment. The computer for the x-ray machine was broken, so they couldn't give us any results so they did never started her on treatment. She became gravely ill and died without ever getting any results."

"At my local hospital all three lifts are broken. Now an NGO is in charge of carrying patients up and down the stairs in body bags while ensuring they get oxygen through breathing apparatus. It's nightmarish," revealed a third.

All individuals remained anonymous for fear of reprisal and victimisation from the former MEC for speaking out.

The position of Free State MEC of Health is currently being advertised on many job sites.

Key measures outlined by the Premier:

- There should be alignment between political decisions and operational implementation and agreement reached for any proposals on increases of service levels prior to their announcement. The availability of funding should also be confirmed.
- Realistic budgets set that can be used as a guideline for the financial year's activities. Operational plans to be aligned with available funding to deliver the services.
- The review of national and provincial

models of monitoring and delivering ARVs to ensure that it is sustainable, affordable, equitable and addresses issues of access.

- Restructuring, with a view to establishing minimum staffing levels, to be undertaken based on a number of factors including objectively agreed benchmarks, the provincial disease burden profile, optimal application of scarce skills and service delivery priorities as well as on available resources.
- M&E needs to become a central component of all managerial activity with the use of objective information being the basis for decision making.

- Service delivery needs to be one of the priority strategic issues of senior management in the provincial department.
- All planning processes in the department should be simplified and aligned with each other and well communicated. There should be a limited number of key targets for each area of operation for which managers are responsible and accountable.
- All recently dismissed community healthcare workers should be reinstated immediately with improved rights, clear scope of practice and increased salaries.

Chaos at ANC Lekgotla



Details emerged yesterday of the fighting that broke out at the emergency ANC lekgotla held in Pretoria on the eve of President Jacob Zuma's State of the Nation address.

The fighting left a number of senior ANC leaders with cuts and bruises, which is why a number of them wore plasters and bandages during the President's address.

Sources say the argument started when an unnamed member asked the house to consider the undue power provinces have over the party. The

member specifically noted the embarrassment caused to the party by the poor leadership in provinces such as the Free State and Mpumalanga. At this stage a point of order was called, but despite the chair's best efforts the meeting degenerated into "fisty cuffs".

Another source explained that tensions had been brewing for some

time within the party. "Luthuli House is tired of being embarrassed by the frankly shameful leadership the ANC is providing in provinces like the Free State." The source speculated that senior ANC leadership sees wayward provincial leaders as the greatest threat to the ANC's ongoing electoral majority.

-- A LONG AND HEALTHY LIFE FOR ALL PEOPLE IN FREE STATE --

MEC OF HEALTH FREE STATE PROVINCE

REF NO: NO MOR3 L1ES



We are currently recruiting for a candidate to urgently take up the position of MEC of Health in the Free State. Following under-achievement by the former MEC, only applicants who fulfil all requirements will be considered. Candidates will be subjected to suitability checks and other vetting procedures to prevent an unqualified MEC being appointed again.

CANDIDATE REQUIREMENTS:

- Under no circumstances must the candidate be facing multiple charges of corruption or have engaged in corrupt activity that has abused their position of authority
- The candidate must act in an honest and trustworthy manner and not be prone to telling lies to the public and media
- Candidates must be able to respond to evidence portraying major health system collapse (including medicine stock outs, facilities lacking electricity, water, and/or sanitation, failing emergency medical services, critical staff shortages, and other major failings) in an effective and urgent manner
- Candidates must have demonstrable experience in providing clear oversight, direction and management in implementing health policies effectively and improving health conditions
- The candidate must never use their political power to ensure family, friends, colleagues or acquaintances receive medical care ahead of those who should be prioritised according to standard medical procedure
- Prospective candidates must have the ability to build meaningful working relationships with civil society organisations, patient groups and health professionals
- Under no circumstances must the candidate resort to tactics of fear or intimidation in the province
- Candidates must demonstrate that they do not have a "saviour" complex
- It is critical that the candidate is hard working and dedicated to working in the public interest in line with the Constitutional obligation to realise the right to access health

DUTIES:

- To provide a full and complete disclosure of the state of the province's finances
- To release a frank and detailed assessment of the state of the province's health system
- To produce and implement an effective and evidence based turn around plan to improve conditions in the Free State with clear timelines
- To implement the 2009 recommendations of government's Integrated Support Team investigation into the Free State health system
- To reinstate all recently dismissed Community Healthcare Workers with improved rights, clear scope of practice and increased salaries

ENQUIRIES: Interested candidates can enquire at firebenny@gmail.com. Full details of the job can be found through #firebenny on twitter

CLOSING DATE: This position must be filled urgently to prevent a worsening of the increasingly dire situation

NOTES: Potential candidates should be willing to accept a reasonable salary and make a pledge of commitment to public service and self-sacrifice. Preference will be given to candidates who opt to use the Free State public health service for their own personal health needs.

Any resemblance to persons living or dead is a mere coincidence.