

29 JULY 2019: OPINION EDITORIAL

WCPDF RESPONSE TO PREMIER ALAN WINDE'S STATE OF THE WESTERN CAPE PROVINCE ADDRESS

Without commitment countrywide from officials and politicians, economic growth will never happen

The Western Cape Property Development Forum (WCPDF) welcomes the State of the Province Address delivered by Premier Alan Winde on 18 July which, to a large extent, mirrored the SONA address of President Ramaphosa on the desperate need for economic growth and job creation.

As an industry representative body, the WCPDF represents the interests of the development, consulting and construction sectors involved in fixed capital projects ranging from public infrastructure to private developments.

The property development industry is the bellwether industry that reflects the state of the economy. This industry, which began to haemorrhage a few years ago due to the state of the economy, is now in crisis mode. It is being decimated, on the one side, by the collapse of the construction industry and the resultant exodus of qualified contractors and consultants to foreign shores. On the other, and in terms of those who are unable to seek work elsewhere, particularly among its semi-skilled workforce, it is resulting in abject poverty and increasing numbers of "men at the side of the road", who congregate daily in the desperate hope of a wage for the day. Private sector investment is being hamstrung by lack of political certainty and ever-increasing regulation and red tape.

The construction industry employs labour and the consulting industry employs scarce skills. Developers, whether public or private sector, are entrepreneurial in their thinking and invest multigenerational. All are critical to the economy and to the wellbeing of our nation. All depend on growth as fuel for their respective specialist skills.

Last week, the newly appointed Premier of the Western Cape, Alan Winde, for the first time officially placed a growth target of 2.5% on the table, the goal being to deliver on the desperate need for job creation. He has bought into the concept of an economic war room, and has included the property and construction industries among the first to be included. And to this end, he has set his personal focus on unblocking growth inhibitors, much the same language as used by President Ramaphosa in his most recent SONA address.

Both President Ramaphosa and Premier Winde are clearly singing from the same hymn sheet even though they stand in different political realms. They have both confirmed their desire to lift the country to its full potential and create a future for generations to come by addressing safety, education and economic growth.

Winde has, without reneging on the Western Cape's history of clean governance, thrown down the gauntlet to the standard delivery excuse of audit compliance: *"We will not slow down a single second of delivery for the sake of compliance with the Auditor General."* These are strong words; the words of a statesman and not a party employee. Words that are synonymous, again, with those of President Ramaphosa.

Party political opportunism and excuses have held the country to ransom for far too long. The Western Cape can be the practical illustration of leaders with different party-political affiliations using the same language, sharing the same goals and working together to achieve true value for its citizens.

While we celebrate national and provincial leaders for delivering strong messages, service delivery remains largely a municipal function. We are yet, however, to hear this type of strong language come from the mouths of mayors and municipal functionaries. Our call therefore to each mayor in the Western Cape, and in the rest of South Africa, is: declare growth and reduction in red tape to be your personal commitment to the people of this country. Dare to challenge the NIMBYs who oppose change and, by implication, growth.

Both President Ramaphosa and Premier Winde have voiced their concern on the tenacity of Apartheid planning and the lack of social integration. This will only be addressed if we use public resources to break down historic boundaries, by investing in infrastructure linking communities, and by redeveloping public-owned land. It is time to stop talking and to start doing. This power is at municipal scale. It is time for each mayor to declare their personal commitment.

We wait in anticipation to hear similar language from the mouths of each mayor in the Western Cape, and also from each one in the rest of the country. More so, we expect mayors to go beyond lip service and start to truly measure their own performance in terms of capital budget expenditure and the removal of unnecessary hurdles to investment and job creation. We challenge each one of them to look their children and grandchildren in the eye and to guarantee them a better future.

We expect each mayor to fight the 2021 local authority election from the basis of proven delivery and economic growth and not based on more promises.

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