

BUDGET VOTE SPEECH
(VOTE 3);

TABLED BY: MR. NEO MASITHELA
MEC FOR TOURISM, ENVIRONMENTAL AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS

25 APRIL 2008,

AT THE FOURTH RAADZAL (BLOEMFONTEIN)

Honourable Speaker

Honourable Madame Deputy Speaker,

Honourable Madame Premier,

Honourable Members of the Legislature,

Leaders of different political parties,

Mayors and Speakers of different Municipalities,

Chairpersons and Board Members of different Public Entities,

Members of State Institutions supporting democracy,

Director-General and Heads of different Provincial Departments,

Marena le Dikgosi,

Today, like many times before, we are called upon to make a frank assessment of our war against poverty and inequality which underpinned our electoral mandate since 2004. Our task as we wind off the mandate is to assess the extent to which our actions as a department have kept pace with our intentions of bringing a meaningful change to the lives of the poor masses in this province.

Honourable Speaker, the reconstruction and development programme for the lives of our people ravaged by apartheid policies for many years, advances everyday. We stand in this house today as we did in many other public platforms throughout the Province convinced that our people's lives have changed for the better. Indeed the tide of underdevelopment and lack of basic services has turned. Today, more than ever before, an ever increasing number of people can truly and rightfully say theirs is a much different world from their fore bearers, a world where they can exercise their options and choices, a free world.

Speaker, the most appropriate words to express these sentiments come from Gautam Bharali a pupil from Springdales School in India. In a Poem titled "A Vision for Africa" we read,
***" A vicious system of segregation,
is one day deemed to fall;
for it is devised not on reason,
but on primeval irrationality***

***A milestone around the human conscience,
crystallisation of racism and tyranny;
at which human sensibility revolts,
for apartheid degrades humanity***

***That is why blacks has risen,
the South African movement has gained momentum;
to throw the fetters of human bondage,
and finally claim freedom."***

Against the backdrop of this freedom, we entered into people's contract to advance the vision of the Freedom charter which celebrated 50 years two years ago. It is through this contract Honourable Speaker, that it became unequivocally clear that economic policies introduced by the African National Congress are not only progressive but have contributed to our National Democratic Revolution. This is a confirmation that "the system of segregation has indeed fallen" as Gautam predicted. Through the economic policies of this land we have pushed back the frontiers of poverty and therefore "thrown the fetters of human bondage" as Gautam prophesied.

Every single objective survey conducted in this country, suggest that government's pro poor policies are indeed positively changing people's life. We now know that an increasing number of our people continue to escape the poverty trap. There has been a significant decline in a number of people living under R3000.00 a year. This number decreased from 52% to 43% since year 2000. This is the power of the revolution of human sensibility against racism and tyranny of colonial and apartheid rule that Gautam Barhali envisaged in the Vision for Africa.

This we believe marked a new epoch for the people of South Africa - the Age of Hope. Buoyed by promising signs of a better life for all and the confidence of our people in the ANC government, we soldiered on and intensified our struggle against poverty. This we did by keeping on our radar screen, the issue of poverty and unemployment at the center of our programme of action.



Since 2004, the FDC has approved and disbursed six hundred and fifteen (615) loans to the value of R314 million. We have worked hard during this period to reduce the high failure rate of SMMEs in the Free State. We believe that the courageous and robust lending policies and models introduced in the past financial year are the right tonic for SMME development.

The promotion of Free State companies and products and identification as well as penetration of international markets has been high on this government's priority list. This process has presented many of our entrepreneurs with lifetime opportunities. We are pleased to report to this house that since 2004, 123 previously disadvantaged individuals have been given the opportunity to exhibit their products on the international stage in Africa, ASIA, Europe and Scandinavian countries and some of them are still servicing contracts secured through this intervention.

Though necessary for healthy competition and good for the consumer, free trade can at times be harmful. Our consumer right protection programmes have yielded massive results over this period. Since 2004, 863 consumer complaints valued at R 2.7 million were lodged with the consumer protector. Eighty percent of these cases have been resolved in favour of the consumers. Speaker, from the consumer court alone, this government has put back in the pockets of Free State consumers R 601 035.58 which the unscrupulous business people had stolen from our poor people.

Honourable Members, it is befitting to report at the occasion of the presentation of this report card that racing and gambling industry has made meaningful contribution to the economy of the Free State. We are proud to report to this house that the casino industry has made a collective capital investment of R421 million since 2004. From this investment, a total of 1146 jobs have been created. A further 608 jobs have been created in the horseracing industry.

Similarly, tourism has surpassed expectation since the turn of new democracy. All signs in the Free State confirm that 'tourism is a new gold'. In response to this growth, we have developed aggressive and elaborate training programme to ensure that as many people as possible should be absorbed by this industry. Since 2004, R2 million has been spent on training 150 people in different aspects of tourism. Our intention is to make sure that many people who hitherto were excluded from this industry, are poised to take active part during the period leading to, during and after FIFA World Cup.

The conservation of our environmental and bio-diversity have presented us with a rare and yet important opportunity to create much needed jobs. Through programmes like the rehabilitation of wetlands, and removal of alien species, capturing and counting of game, 266 people who otherwise would never ever work, found employment.

Honourable Speaker, looking at these achievements, we will not hesitate to shout at the top of our voices in unison, like JT Gumede when he came back from Soviet Union and say, 'we have seen a new Jerusalem'. We therefore have to double our efforts in addressing the social conditions of our people through economic growth to realize economic progress for the poor. Indeed we are poised for a final onslaught on poverty in view of the growing rate of economy in our province which today is standing at 4.2% and the ever declining unemployment which was recorded at 38.9% in 2004, 35% in 2005, 28% in 2006 and recorded at 26.5% in 2007.

Against this background, we safely can conclude that we are winning the war against poverty, war against unemployment and war against inequality.



To deliver even a heavier blow against these social ills we call for a greater collaboration among all stakeholders for faster economic growth in the Free State so that we can create decent work and better life for our people.

For this purpose, this department has been allocated a budget of R 302,836,000 which is an increase of 13.2 % compared to the previous year. This allocation increases to R348 892 000 in the outer year of the MTEF period.

Honourable Speaker, to consolidate our gains, our emphasis during this fiscal year will be on the following;

- To intensify collaboration and coordination of development programmes
- To further improve SMME development
- To intensify tourism promotion and development
- To improve environmental management
- To increase trade and investment promotion
- To propel skills development through learnerships and internship and
- To enhance cooperative governance among all spheres of government

Honourable Speaker SMME Development is central to programmes undertaken by this department hence our special emphasis this year on collaboration and coordination. This we do to minimize wastage, duplication and double dipping by some of the intended beneficiaries. For this purpose we have put aside R103.69 million for SMME development.

Honourable Speaker, the experience of the past years has taught us that our efforts to promote sustainable SMME development in the Free State will not be complete in the absence of a comprehensive SMME and Cooperatives Development framework that will serve to coordinate and integrate business development and support activities that are undertaken by other institutions like FDC, SEDA, SAMAF, NDA, TEP, Khula Enterprises, IDC, amongst others. The envisaged framework will go a long way in terms of clarifying each institution's role within the enterprise development value-chain in order to maximize the impact on the mainstream economy.

In collaboration with the Department of Local Government and Housing, we will establish a provincial LED Forum to serve as a platform for regular consultation and capacity building. In addition, these two departments will continue to support the rollout of the "Khulis'umnotho Project", the initiative of the department of trade and industry (dti) where teams of Development specialists are deployed to Xhariep, Lejweleputswa and Thabo Mofutsanyana district municipalities to assist district municipalities to build their capacity to develop credible LED strategies and bankable projects.

Speaker, available body of research paints a worrying picture in the emancipation of vulnerable groups such as women, the disabled and the youth who continue to shoulder a huge burden of poverty and underdevelopment. The recently released survey conducted by the provincial Treasury, revealed a very low participation of women in economic activities in the Free State. We say the transformation of the Free State economy will forever elude us if we do not bring women in to the fold.

Nako ya ho qhelela bomme ka thoko ditabeng tsa kgolo ya moruo e fetile. Re tla be re ithetsa ha re ka nna ra re bomme ha ba na seabo moruong le dikgwebong haese tsa catering, cleaning, le di bed and breakfast.



Women have played a very important part in the liberation struggle and continue to play an important role in the transformation of our society. Why should we place imaginary obstacle and so called glass ceilings for them? We owe it to ourselves and to women and coming generations to be biased towards women when economic opportunities present themselves- there is no other alternative.

We therefore commit ourselves to play an activist and interventionist role in the economy so as to stimulate growth and development through raising awareness of economic opportunities that are available for the youth, women and people with disabilities. In fact when the people gathered in Kliptown in 1955 they declared through the Freedom Charter that, "The people shall share in the wealth of the country. All other industry and trade shall be controlled to assist the wellbeing of people". Surely we can't argue against that now.

In yet another collaboration effort, the department in partnership with the Free State Youth Commission, UYF, SAWIMA, SAWEN, SAWIC and other related stakeholders will host a Youth Economic Summit and Women Empowerment Conference to address these issues.

Honourable Speaker, what we are presenting here is a direct reference to the ANC National Conference held in Polokwane. I wish to take the liberty to refresh this house about the sentiments of the conference. *"The skewed patterns of ownership and production, the spatial legacies of the apartheid past and the tendencies of the economy towards inequality, dualism and marginalization will not recede automatically as the economic growth accelerates. Therefore the decisive action is required to thoroughly and urgently transform the economic patterns of the present in order to realize our vision for the future. This includes addressing the monopoly domination of our economy, which remains an obstacle to the goals of economic transformation, growth and development"*

I wish to turn to state procurement. The Executive Council has laid down a policy directing that 70% of state procurement should go to SMMEs in the Free State. This was done because procurement plays an important facilitative role in creating opportunities geared towards accommodating SMMEs and helps develop and manage partnerships between the private and the public sector.

Our own research on the impact of government procurement policies on SMMEs in the Free State, reveal that an overwhelming 84% of SMME's in the Free State rely on government procurement for survival. A worrying factor is that though 84% depend on government contracts, only 68% have knowledge of government procurement processes. A further concern to us is that 42% of companies owned by previously disadvantaged (PDI), subcontract 50% of the contract to the third party. A complicating factor is that 55% of these companies do not have a particular reason for this action whilst 16% do not possess necessary skills to complete the contract.

Honourable Speaker, having analysed patterns of applications for finance and the disbursement of funds, we have instructed the FDC to develop a disbursement policy by the end of the 1st quarter, which will ensure that once the loan has been approved funds are disbursed without undue delay. In this way, we will be able to facilitate entrance of a considerably high number of SMMEs into the mainstream economy.

We also wish to take this opportunity to announce that after an intense and close scrutiny, the Government, through the Free State Racing and Gambling Board has licenced two Route Operators to issue Limited Payout Machines. The methodology of issuing of the



LPMs is modelled around our supply chain management principles with 70% of these machines to be distributed to SMMEs in the Free State. We also wish to take this opportunity to announce that we will also finalize the policy governing Bingo licences in the Free State before the end of the financial year.

Honourable Speaker, now than ever before has the cooperation and collaboration of public entities among themselves and with the department been so critical. Our message to the management and boards of these entities is that they should respond to the public mandate. For this reason, we have put in place robust processes and systems to ensure compliance and effectiveness of these entities. These include the creation of CEO's forum, quarterly reviews and of course the establishment of a dedicated unit for agency support.

Honourable Speaker, we had serious problems with the administration of liquor licences in the past. These resulted among others in the amendment of the Liquor Act, placement of the moratorium on issuing of new licences and building the necessary capacity in the administration. Whilst we are committed to dealing with the backlogs, our major concern is the regulation of the industry to minimize the devastating impact of alcohol abuse on our society.

To effectively deal with these problems, we have installed a new more effective liquor licence processing system to replace the current outdated one. We are confident that the new system will assist in improving the turnaround times as well as to ensure regular monitoring and compliance to the provincial legislation. We want to restore the confidence in the governance of this important industry.

Honourable Members, a fundamental shift in the administration of liquor licences is that for the first time in the history of this province, submission of new liquor licence applications will be made at the municipalities. In order to systematically manage this transition, the Department will conduct capacity building training workshops with municipalities in the 5 districts to enable them to effectively assume this new function.

In order to complete the process leading to repealing the Liquor Act no 27 of 1989, the Free State Liquor Regulations have been finalized and have been published in the provincial gazette. As we implement the Provincial Liquor Act no 3 of 2007 and the accompanying Regulations, we have also finalized the appointment of the board of the Free State Liquor Authority. This board will be inaugurated at a function tonight.

As indicated before, the promotion of fair business practice and the protection of consumer rights to uphold public interest and entrench constitutional rights is another vital intervention towards the transformation of the economy. In the effort to uphold public interest, the amended provincial consumer legislation will be presented for public comment before the end of the year to ensure that the Free State Consumer Court continues to successfully prosecute those companies that infringe consumer rights.

As part of International Consumer Rights Day which was celebrated in Machabeng on the 14th March, we focused on raising awareness on how conservation of electricity shortage can lessen its negative impact on consumers. We distributed energy saving bulbs to 2000 households, conducted house to house campaign, visited shopping malls and taxi ranks and distributed 5000 pamphlets to spread the government's message to save electricity.

In addition to this, the department will host a provincial consumer rights conference to raise awareness and disseminate information regarding the Constitutional rights of citizens in the



province. In this regard, the department will host not less than 48 joint consumer/liquor information road-shows in the 5 districts.

Speaker, we have noted with concern the voluntary nature and limitations of the BBBEE Codes of Good Practice in as far as compelling companies to comply. It is for this very reason that we are considering developing a provincial Broad Based Black Economic Empowerment (BBBEE) strategy which caters for the dynamics in the province as this targeted strategy will enhance our efforts to broaden participation in the mainstream economy and promote shared growth.

Honourable Speaker, we are hard at work to find a respectable place for our economy in the world economy. We believe that in collaboration with our strategic partners we have to double our efforts to raise the foreign direct investment in the Free State. To improve our chances and benefits from vibrant world trade, we continue to participate in international and local platforms where Free State products and companies compete with others.

Speaker, allow us the opportunity to share with this house our experience with our mission to Belgium where 20 SMMEs, mostly women from the Free State were presented with a lifetime opportunity of participating in the Accenta Trade Fair 2007. A moving experience in that trade fair was when a woman from the rural parts of the Free State displayed remarkable entrepreneurial ingenuity. In realizing that her wares were selling fast and she could run out, she started to 'ration' herself so that she could use all allocated time in the stall profitably and most importantly surprisingly displayed a superior understanding of the principle of supply and demand and how that improves the pricing. The principle here is that she sold all her wares at even higher price.

We have recently received a confirmation from Khanya Creations, a jewellery manufacturing company in Virginia which has secured an order from a foreign company as a result of their participation in the Accenta Trade Fair. This, honourable members is a demonstration that our trade promotion interventions are indeed yielding results.

Although we will continue to undertake trade and investment missions to identified markets as well as participate in various exhibitions, the department has repositioned its trade promotion drive to ensure that as we promote products from the province, we simultaneously promote the province as a destination for tourism and investment.

On the 28th March 2008 we launched the Asia Expo and Investment Conference 2008. Through this intervention, we strengthened and consolidated the South South Co-operation Agreement and the India, Brazil and South Africa (IBSA) Agreement. On the occasion of this launch, over twenty five (25) ambassadors from Asian and Gulf and selected African states, converged in the Free State to launch our offensive on the markets in the Middle East.

The Asia Expo and Investment Conference 2008 will be held in the Free State on 17,18 and 19 October 2008. This exercise will be a platform for the promotion of trade, tourism and culture between South African, African, Middle East and Asian companies and is intended to facilitate the development of import and export and investment opportunities between the participating companies.

This EXPO, Honourable members, is not only intended to provide a stimulant for the economy to help us create necessary jobs but will also foster trust and understanding between our countries by promoting cultural and tourism experience exchange.



It is common knowledge that, the Free State Province has identified Asia and the Middle-east regions as ideal and strategic partners in an effort to improve the competitiveness of the provincial economy. This improvement could only be realized by stimulating high-levels of economic activity through trade, investment and technical cooperation.

This activity will be followed by exploratory tour to the province by ambassadors from the targeted countries followed by trade and investment missions to the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Vietnam and Kuwait. It is envisaged that these events will generated massive awareness for the province as an ideal tourism and investment destination in South Africa.

Honourable Speaker, we believe that it is appropriate at this stage to announce our decision to establish industrial incubations in Qwaqwa and Botshabelo by end of July. The FDC, in collaboration with other stakeholders like The National Small Industries Corporation of India, the Centrals University of Technology and many others, will provide capital equipment and capacity building to Free State industrialists who otherwise are unable to set up their own enterprises. R10 million has been set aside for this project.

Honourable Members, our deep resolve to facilitate and increase investment in trade opportunities in targeted sectors in the Free State still stands. The Free State Investment Promotion Agency (FIPA) has started with its operations. This Agency is tasked with helping to identify, analyse and market opportunities in the Free State.

Emphasis will be placed on the folowing;

- Harrismith Transport Logistics
- Bio-fuels
- Business Outsourcing and Off shoring
- Chemical down streaming.
- N8 Development Corridor

We will focus our attention towards facilitating economic activity at local government level as well as to strengthen the capacity of LED official in packaging economic opportunities. To this end, the department together with Free State Investment Promotion Agency will develop a joint database of investment projects that would form part of a comprehensive investment offerings to international investors.

Honourable Speaker, it is our humble submission that recognition should be part of our business processes. At the center of this process is the identification and replacement of poor practices with best practices in our businesses. To address this, the annual Premier's Exports Awards have been revamped and expanded to recognize a wide range of stakeholders in their respective categories of business activities in the province. As a result, a new business award ceremony will be held in October 2008 to coincide with the Annual SMME Week and the Asia Expo 2008.

As these events are primarily focused on the development and promotion of small enterprises in the province, all efforts will be made to ensure that SMMEs from district and local municipalities are given a platform to exhibit their products to international customers. Furthermore, in the effort to encourage organic and sustainable growth of these SMMEs, procurement that accrues as a result of his these events will strictly adhere to the provincial procurement policy.

Drawing from the experience of the past years and the uncoordinated and fragmented approach to SMME development, the department will facilitate the process leading to the formation of a collective voice for business in the province by the establishment of Free State chapter of



Business Unity South Africa, to effectively integrated organized business in the provincial government's plan of action as partners. The department will also host quarterly consultative meetings with non-aligned industry associations in order to advance the sector development agenda as a collective.

Similarly, through collaboration and coordination between the department, the Department of the Premier, Free State Youth Commission and the National Skills Development Fund a database of unemployed graduates will be used to enroll them into the Monyetla 2 Work Readiness Programme in order to develop appropriate talent for identified sectors.

Meanwhile, the launch of the National Biofuels Strategy in 2007 has necessitated that the province should explore other secondary generation input sources to reposition the province to effectively play a central role in the growth and development of the sector despite limitations imposed on the use of maize for biofuels. In this regard, the department will commission a comprehensive study to analyze the economic impact of excluding maize as an input product as well as develop a compelling business-case for the rapid development of the sector in the province.

Honourable Speaker, with its majestic scenery and rich culture and history, there is no reason why the Free State province is not taking advantage of the international interest of global film industry in low cost film location like South Africa. The Department has already started the process to develop the provincial film policy and strategy. The policy will be the basis for cooperation of all stakeholders to inter alia develop and promote the film and video industry, encourage the development and distribution of local film and video products as well as supporting the nurturing and development of and access to the film and video industry.

To date, we have had consultation with various stakeholders in the film industry. The FSGDS has identified tourism as uniquely positioned to create unlimited opportunities for SMMEs which would assist to address challenges faced in the second economy. In order to unlock this potential, we will collaborate with municipalities to develop tourism-sensitive LED strategies that would enable them to fully exploit tourism potentials that are endowed in their localities through the pursuit of coordinated and seamless linkages with DEAT, DTI, FSTA, TEP, FIPA, SEDA and the department.

We are therefore planning a provincial stakeholder consultative conference on 5 and 6 May to be held here in Bloemfontein. In order to plan towards the development and transformation of the sector as a collective. In this regard, the department intends to utilize the consultation platform with key stakeholders to assess the state of readiness for the 2010 World Cup, facilitate linkages between emerging and established product owners so as to facilitate skills transfer and to encourage more investments in the tourism space.

With the Executive Council of the Free State's approval of the commercialization strategy, five resorts have been identified for commercialization, namely Phillip Saunders, Soetdoring, Willem Pretorious, Sandveld, Maria Moroka, and Sterkfontein Dam. The commercialization of these resorts will contribute to the collaborative effort to increase bed availability in the Province for FIFA 2010.

Speaker, we came across a worrying piece of information. Statistics show that Free Staters are very mobile people but they are always on the way somewhere except their own Province. On the other hand positive news is that the Free State province has had an increase in both the visitor numbers and bed nights in 2006 compared to 2005. This represents a 13.9% increase



in visitor numbers and 34 percent increase in bed nights. To improve this situation further we have developed the Tourism Master Plan.

The Tourism Master Plan has been developed in collaboration with all stakeholders and provides a framework for tourism destination marketing in the Free State. This plan is based on acceptance of the principles of destination management and marketing, and recognizes that market research indicates that tourists seek experiences related to destinations when choosing to visit an area.

We believe that we are now ready and able to position the Free State as an inland tourism destination of choice. In view of this, we instructed the Free State Tourism Authority to attract more tourists and ensure that we keep them here longer. Let us take this opportunity to announce in this house that the Free State brand has been approved and will be unveiled at the annual Tourism Indaba in Kwazulu Natal on 11 May 2008.

Sustainable environmental management lies at the center of sustainable economic development and all programmes aimed at that. This programme has been allocated R131, 569 million which is an increase of 437 % compared to the previous year so that among others law enforcement efforts can begin to bite even harder.

To this effect, we wish to announce the designation of further 15 officials from the province as Environment Management Inspectors. A further 15 officials will be trained during this financial year.

Our added efforts in this regard are motivated by high violation of environmental laws in this province. During the past three years, in collaboration with the SAPS, we have confiscated 13.586 tons of abalone to the value of R13 million. The past year alone, we confiscated 1 99,163 kilogrammes of Rhino horns worth almost R10 million , 672,728 kilogrammes of elephant ivory to the value of R672 728.00. We also got hold of 7 lions and one cheetah.

To ensure the balance between development and healthy environment, we are very vigilant of what happens around the Province. We therefore issued 29 directives and 37 compliances for different offences.

Honourable Speaker we are currently working hard to ensure that we finalize the Conservation Bill in an effort to strengthen the Law enforcement capacity of the department. The public participation process is currently on and is expected to be finished by the end of April. The aim with this piece of legislation is to repeal the old legislation to make enforcement easier.

Environmental Quality Management interventions of this department should bear immediate results. It is for this reason that we have given the Cleanest Town Competition a face lift. This year this competition will be taking a different format. This time around, this competition will run for a much longer time, with 1495 people employed for at least 4 months during this competition. We are planning a more visible competition inclusive of all key stakeholders such as other sector departments, NGOs, CBOs, the business community and the general community. This process will lead to the evaluation of this competition in September.

Honourable Members, we will also meet our responsibility by developing an Air Quality Management Plan for the province as required by the Air Quality Act. We take this opportunity to announce the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) hotline to assist with all Environmental authorizations. All matters related to EIA should be directed to **086 110 2185**.



The management and conservation of Biodiversity in the Free State is high on our priority list. We will initiate a study on the Alien Invasive Species related to Birds, Fishes and animals as per requirement of the NEMA: Biodiversity Act. Once again, to ensure sustainable development to realise environment that is not harmful to the health of the people of the Free State now and in the future, we will be finalizing the Free State Bioregional plan that will, among others, inform all spatial developmental plans.

In yet another collaborative work, we have committed ourselves for faster integrated economic growth in the Free State. We are planning an Environmental Youth summit in conjunction with the Provincial department of Education in June. The aim of the summit is to raise awareness on Environmental management issues to the Youth.

Six years after the World Sustainable Development, (WSSD) held in Johannesburg in 2002 we believe the time has arrived to assess progress made so far. We will therefore hold an Environmental Summit and launch the Free State Environmental Advisory Forum later this year.

Acknowledging the energy challenges facing this country, the department will continue to participate in the Ingula Resource Reserve in the Thabo Mofutsanyana District Municipality that intends to provide 1300 MW hydroelectric power to the National Grid of ESKOM whilst conserving biodiversity of high significance in the surrounding 9000 hectares of land, grasslands and wetlands. 200 people from the Free State will be employed as contract workers in this project during this financial year.

Honourable Members, our task to transform the game industry, though onerous, remains a necessity. This province is teeming with wild life. The biological stock is currently valued at R60 million. We honestly have to look at ways and means of leveraging this state asset in the best interest of the previously disadvantaged. We have just held a successful annual game auction where we took the opportunity to introduce several potential black game farmers to this industry. With the action having yielded R17 million turnover, we are more than ever before, committed to growing the population of black game farmers in this province so that they too can benefit from our natural and biological resources.

Honourable Members a huge amount of work has gone into the Vredefort Dome World Heritage Site. To date, we have spent in excess of R20 million rand in collaboration with the Department of Tourism and Environmental Affairs and Fezile Dabi District Municipality. The Interpretation Centre is fast approaching completion at 65% and the upgrading of two network roads S212 and S254 is well underway. We are also pleased to announce that the International Geological Conference will be held at the Vredefortdome from 17 to 21 August 2008. This is a rear opportunity when the world comes to Vredefortdome and we will ensure that in collaboration with Fezile Dabi District and Ngwathe Local Municipalities we are ready for this international event.

By the end of this year, an office will be opened in Vredefort at Ngwathe Municipality for the management of the Vredefort Dome world heritage site. This will ensure the accessibility of Free State government to the inhabitants of the world heritage site.

We would like to take this opportunity to inform this house that a province-wide spatial based geographic information system (GIS) providing information and supporting decision making on environmental, tourism and economic matters has been established. The system will serve as a depository for all geographical data in the Free State eg, schools, BB,s, hospitals, clinics, towns, municipalities, hotels, etc.



Honourable Members, noble ideas alone are not enough. The acid test is that the implementation of this programme of action should assume importance. We therefore are urged in line with the 24 Apex of Priorities to “strengthen the machinery of government to ensure that it has the capacity to respond to our development imperatives.”

We are therefore committed to recruiting and retaining people of requisite skills to put their hands on deck for the final onslaught on poverty and unemployment. We have acknowledged scarcity of skills needed to push our economy to a higher trajectory. Our response is of course growing our own timber.

We will continue to provide both full time and part time bursaries to help us deal with the skills deficit in our province. We will also jealously guard our learnership and internship programme from which there have emerged diamonds which have been absorbed in the labour market.

Since the inception of this programme in 2004, 123 unemployed graduates have enrolled in this project on which we have spent R2.612 million so far. Of these interns, 39 of them found work both in the public service and the private sector. This is a success rate of 31.7%. To further give impetus to this programme, 24 of these interns who were still in the system at the end of their contract have been given an additional contract of 12 months. Speaker, with the collaboration of all of us, we can deal a telling blow to unemployment with this programme. In this financial year we are taking 63 unemployed graduate and 30 learnership and have budgeted R2.7 million for this purpose. We are ready now and in the future to tackle our mandate to grow the economy and create jobs in the Free State.

Honourable Speaker, I wish to take this opportunity to thank the former Chairperson of the portfolio committee on Tourism, Environmental and Economic Affairs Honourable Thoko Mokoenyana and the new Chairperson Honourable Hans Nketu as well as other members for their support and guidance in the execution of our public mandate as the representatives of the people.

The support and commitment and leadership demonstrated by the Premier and members of the Economic, Employment and Investment Cluster over the past year has helped us traverse this distance in our journey of the reconstruction of development of the lives of our people. In deed we are thankful.

Special thanks to my family for their understanding and support during this campaign of building a caring society.

My gratitude and encouragement goes to members of the boards who continue to find time amid their tight schedules to contribute to our collaborative efforts of transforming our economy so that we could create decent work for our people.

Speaker, it would be remiss of me not express my sincerest appreciation to the Head of the Department Mr Thabo Khunyeli the CEO's and all officials of the department and the public entities for the selfless service they have committed to the people of the Free State.

THANK YOU







