

At the tip of Africa, There is a Place...

2026 STATE OF THE PROVINCE ADDRESS

GEORGE, WESTERN CAPE

25 FEBRUARY 2026

Honourable Speaker and Deputy Speaker,

Honourable Cabinet Ministers,

Honourable Leader of the Opposition,

Honourable Leaders of Opposition Parties,

Honourable Members of the Western Cape Provincial Parliament,

The Leadership of the Griqua National Conference of South Africa,

Paramount Chief Alan Andrew Le Fleur and Chief Cedrick Sidney

van Eeden,

Members of the Consular Corps,

Heads of Department,

Executive Mayors and Deputy Mayors,

Municipal Managers,

Distinguished Guests,

Abantu baseNtshona Koloni,

Mense van die Wes-Kaap,

People of the Western Cape.

Welkom, wamkelekile, welcome.

Introduction

At the tip of Africa there is a place where the human spirit is as vibrant as the landscape itself. It is a melting pot of history where culture echoes through colourful streets and the smell of woodsmoke from a gallyblik drifts across the evening air.

At the tip of Africa there is a place where the aroma of the fynbos becomes an instant memory. It's a scent that tells you, before you've even seen the peaks of the Twelve Apostles or the beaches of the Garden Route, that you have arrived somewhere that feels like the beginning of the world.

At the tip of Africa there is a place where Karoo nights reveal a sky so thick with stars you feel you could reach out and touch the milky way.

At the tip of Africa there is a place where culinary flavours serve as a map of shared histories, from enjoying a Cape Malay curry shared in the vibrant streets of the Bo-Kaap to a rustic farm lunch in the valleys of the Overberg.

This is our Western Cape, where Weskus kreef lands up on lunchtime braais, where bunches of grapes become world-class wines, and where rural roads take you from valleys to mountaintops. This is our home and it is a special place that becomes part of the fibre of our beings as its dust settles under our skin.

This home of ours is the birthplace of ancient innovation and culture, but it is also the cutting edge of the Silicon Cape.

There is a collective energy here that refuses to stand still – an energy found in Cape Town's fintech boardrooms and in the grit of software developers in the Black River Business Park. And it's a place that we are privileged to call our home.

A State of the Province is a moment in time, a snapshot of the year that was and a peering into the year ahead. It is about the work of government. It is about accounting to the legislature and to our

residents. But tonight, I want it to also be a unifying cry for oneness and togetherness.

So much of the world as we know it is being shaken up by growing divisions and polarisation, both locally and abroad. I see politics built on separation and otherness. I see politics built on anger and vitriol, often driven by disinformation and amplified by midnight keyboard warriors.

Tonight, I make this call: For 2026 and beyond, let us prioritise genuine and meaningful acts of kindness. Kindness that brings people together, that lifts people up, that greets a stranger, that offers words of support, that connects one and all. Over the many years that I have been in Western Cape politics, I have seen so much change. But one thing remains the same - you, the people of this province, and your unwavering resilience and kindness.

The last few years have been tough for many people across South Africa, increasing pressures, failing infrastructure and service delivery, soaring cost-of-living and fewer jobs. Crime is running rampant, with the scourge of gangsterism and gender-based violence tearing apart lives, families and communities.

It is becoming harder to get ahead or simply stay afloat. It is now more important than ever that every sphere of government work tirelessly to turn the economic tide.

Since the formation of the GNU, we are starting to turn a corner. The country has been taken off the grey list, fuel prices are down, inflation is down, and the Rand is stronger than it has been in years.

Speaker, these green shoots of economic revival are most welcome. Here in the Western Cape, economic growth doubled over the last 5 years. Growth projections show the Western Cape growing even faster in 2026, well above national expectations.

To illustrate this, nearly 90% of all net jobs created in South Africa over the last five years were created right here in the Western Cape. That means of the 404 712 total net jobs created, 360 347 of them come from this province.

Speaker, let me put that another way, for every 10 people that got a job over the last 5 years in the country, 9 of them live in the Western Cape.

Speaker, we are determined to do more.

Because at the tip of Africa there is a place where we get things done.

To me, success is simple. It is a government that works for you, at every life stage.

This is a vision that I believe all of us, regardless of political affiliation or ideological standpoint, should be working towards.

It is a family around a table, sharing a meal that they can comfortably afford in dignified housing. It is our young people starting well and being afforded every opportunity to grow up and be healthy and strong.

It is our adult residents living healthy, productive and independent lives, our older residents enjoying their final years with dignity and peace.

It is a safe neighbourhood, where children are free to play cricket and hokkie in clean streets supported by a caring community.

It is a functional municipality where excellent services, infrastructure is maintained and corruption is not tolerated.

At the tip of Africa there is a place with a thriving economy and evermore jobs.

G4J

Growth and Jobs are the cornerstone of our vision, because nothing fixes a life like a job, nothing builds dignity like a job, and nothing puts food on the table like a job.

And Speaker, nothing stops a bullet like a job.

93 000 new jobs were created in this province in the last quarter.

Unemployment in the Western Cape is now down to 18.1%, the lowest in South Africa, and vastly below the national unemployment rate of 31.4%.

In the past year, we've seen-

48,000 new jobs in trade, including hospitality. That is a hotel concierge in Oudtshoorn who can now buy his daughter a new school uniform. That is a new shop attendant in Bredasdorp who can feed her family.

22,000 new jobs in agriculture. That is a grape picker in Worcester who can now buy herself a new dress. That is a cannery worker in Ashton who can buy a bus ticket to visit his Mom in Beaufort West.

22,000 new jobs in construction. That is a quantity surveyor in Plett who can buy his first car. That is a carpenter in Hermanus who can put a deposit down on a new home.

13,000 new jobs in manufacturing. That is a welder in Saldanha who can buy his son new soccer boots and send his daughter to trade school.

These jobs numbers are often made possible by business growth and good governance. Since 2022, the number of small businesses has grown by 143,119. That is 55% growth, compared to only 18% nationally. The Western Cape Government supports this growth by cutting red tape and providing tailored business support.

Our SME Accelerator Support programme partners with the Johannesburg Stock Exchange to strengthen the investment readiness of small businesses. The programme recruited over 200 businesses with funding readiness support and matched 115 of these businesses directly with a range of funders over the past two years.

We have launched an inaugural TechTalks series, where 150 businesses obtained practical guidance on technology adoption,

notably AI, helping small businesses harness innovation for growth.

The programme continues with

Business Chambers are also key enablers in driving growth and jobs.

Tonight, the Chair of the local Business Chamber is here, Mr Willie

Cilliers. A huge thanks to you and your team for supporting

businesses across the Garden Route, a region that is leading the

way.

This government is always innovating. Our department of Economic

Development and Tourism, under the leadership of Minister Ivan

Meyer, is spearheading the establishment of the first commercial

Drones & UAV testing sandbox In Africa.

In aerospace, 20% of all satellites circumnavigating the world have

components made right here in the Cape.

The Western Cape has a booming boatbuilding industry producing

vessels with cutting edge tech.

The Western Cape is also front-and-centre in driving the

revitalisation of the country's ailing logistics sector. Our government

fully supports Operation Vulindlela as a critical national reform

programme to unlock economic growth, create jobs, and

modernise the country's economy.

We welcome measures that will relax competition rules for the country's rail and port networks. Steps to return efficiency to the Port of Cape Town by investing in critical infrastructure are much needed and long overdue.

The Western Cape Government will welcome private sector operators and investors with open arms to achieve this.

Our Mobility Department under Minister Isaac Sileku has expanded the role of the Ports Project Management Unit (PMU), initially created for Cape Town, to also encompass the Ports of Saldanha and Mossel Bay, enabling a province-wide freight coordination ecosystem.

On the railway tracks, our government will continue to advance the Freight Rail Revitalisation Framework that will link the Overberg to our ports and markets internationally, the business for which has just this week been presented to stakeholders. This will start to ease congestion by getting trucks off our roads.

I am happy to see that Kapteinsklip train station in Mitchells Plain has reopened. This will give greater access for residents to other

parts of Cape Town, connecting communities to opportunities. This too will reduce congestion on our roads.

Functional public transport supports growth and jobs.

For many jobseekers, the cost of getting to an interview can be the difference between finding work or staying unemployed. Building on the success of the Jobseeker Travel Voucher Programme in Cape Town, I am delighted to announce that this will expand to George this year, including residents of Thembalethu, Pacaltsdorp, Blanco and Lawaaikamp.

It is fantastic to see the Go George service providing 6 million passenger trips a year. This is one of the most utilised integrated public transport systems in South Arrica with Bus services now operating to Thembalethu and will be expanded to Uniondale this year.

Further support is offered to jobseekers through the provision of free Wi-Fi at 1,600 sites across the province. By December 2025, our network had almost 6 million subscribers. That is a young agricultural student from Vredendal who can send applications for jobs in De

Doorns, or an aunty in Laingsburg who wants to search the web for coastal holidays on the Weskus.

Yesterday, I visited our mobile e-centre bus in Thembaletu and saw dozens of community members lining up to access digital services, such as internet, computer training and assistance with drafting CVs. This year, we will add two more mobile e-centre buses to our fleet, taking this support into more communities around the province.

After a successful, inaugural Western Cape investment summit last year, with a multi-billion Rand deal book. I am delighted to announce that 5 projects are now nearing financial close, with the following set to be announced this year:

1. R600 million in the Green Hydrogen industry;
2. R1.8 bn in the Manufacturing sector;
3. R105 million in the Tech industry;
4. R250 million in the Green Economy (EV) and
5. R400 million in the Solar energy sector.

These projects will create thousands more jobs for our residents. That is thousands more families with food on their table and a roof over their heads. Watch this space.

At the same time, we're seeing massive investment in our cities and towns, with over R9 billion invested last year in Cape Town's CBD property market alone. A further R24 billion is set to be invested in a mixed-used development at Granger Bay.

We are seeing this investment not only in Cape Town but across our municipalities. Last year, the value of building plans passed in the Western Cape grew to almost R35 billion, the highest in the country, with Gauteng coming in second at R28.2 billion.

It's not only investments that are growing, but our exports, too. The Western Cape has recorded a 49% increase in total exports over 3 years from R43.1 billion to R64.1 billion. Next week, through our trade and investment agency, Wesgro, the Western Cape is hosting the Made in the Cape Hosted Buyers' programme at the CTICC, with more local products going onto shelves around the world.

Through our Department of Economic Development and Tourism, we are actively exploring other export markets across the world, from Africa, to Europe, to the far East and Middle East.

We are the jobs province. People move here for better service delivery and for economic opportunity. We welcome investors, risk takers and opportunity-seekers. It is this growth that pours into communities, providing jobs and livelihoods.

At the tip of Africa this is a place where growth enables development. The Western Cape is working and getting things done!

Tourism

Tourism is another powerful economic driver. It has been yet another bumper tourist season with over 11 million two-way passengers through Cape Town International Airport in 2025.

Cape Town International Airport had the busiest December on record. We are now seeing more than 200 international flights touching down every week. We look forward to ACSA getting to work on upgrading the terminal buildings. Cape Town Air Access has been key to this growth and route development, with Delta

increasing the number of weekly flights from Atlanta, and LATAM set to open a new route between Sao Paolo and Cape Town.

We are equally excited about planning progress for the new Winelands Airport, which will inject even more opportunities into our economy and communities.

Here in George, the local airport recorded its best year yet in 2025 with almost 1 million two-way passengers, which is fuelling the local economies of surrounding towns.

Data from Payment Provider, Yoco, showed that during December 2025, Cape Town, Stellenbosch and Plettenberg Bay accounted for 67% of all international visitor payments across the country, with R500 million flowing into our local businesses and protecting and creating even more jobs. This is a Cape Town pastry chef who gets a permanent role in a new bakery. This is a Stellenbosch wine guide who can pay off his student loan. This is a mountain bike mechanic in Plett who can make the final payment on his business loan.

On the seas, Cruise Cape Town, powered by Wesgro, has been developing a strong cruise economy in the Western Cape. During the 2024/25 cruise season, this sector created over 1000 jobs and

contributed R1.8 billion to the province's GDP, up 18% from the previous year. Passengers spent almost R2 billion, up 32% from the previous year. Cruise tourism is now benefiting coastal towns across the province, with visits to Mossel Bay, Hermanus and Saldanha Bay.

Our innovative spirit and drive towards infrastructure-led development hinges on a Provincial Treasury that is nimble, thanks to the leadership of Minister Deidre Baartman. Steering the financial ship, our Treasury noted that Government spending in the last year saw almost R5 billion flowing to women-owned companies, 34% of all procurement, and nearly R4 billion flowing to small and medium enterprises. These numbers are an indication of a focused government at work, supporting growth and jobs.

Through blended finance, which invites the private sector into projects, we're seeing more development than ever before. The private sector and foreign direct investors are proudly partnering with this government to drive our apex priority of growth and jobs.

Infrastructure

We have a potent growth and spatial redress enabler in infrastructure development. At the tip of Africa there is a place

where cranes dot the skylines across cities and towns telling the story of a province that is growing.

In 2025, the construction sector in the Western Cape created 57 341 jobs, a powerful indicator of the confidence in our economy, which saw the value of completed buildings grow by nearly 34%, while it contracted nationally.

During April to December 2025, over and above the 93 000 jobs created in the last quarter, a further 78,000 work opportunities were created in the province through community based and expanded public works programmes.

Infrastructure development and importantly the maintenance thereof is the backbone of the Western Cape's economy and a foundation for sustainable growth. When we invest in roads, ports, energy, water, and digital networks, we unlock opportunities for businesses to grow, trade to flow, and jobs to be created.

Last year, our Department of Infrastructure (DOI), led by Minister Tertuis Simmers, convened the first Western Cape Infrastructure Ministerial Committee. This committee is driving the implementation of the Western Cape Infrastructure Framework 2050.

It helps to create an enabling environment for the establishment of new and innovative partnerships across the three spheres of government, the private sector, selected development finance institutions, and specialised infrastructure agencies. It shows our focus on a sustainable future for all our residents.

The DOI has also developed a first-of-its-kind single integrated pipeline of infrastructure projects in the Western Cape to the value of R152 billion, with 52 of them investment-ready.

In the coming months, the DOI will launch a roads app and a decentralised AI-powered assistant designed to enhance residents' interactions with the department to further improve the quality of our roads.

Housing

Dignity is found in many places. But few are more important than a home. We do not just build houses; we are building hope, access and opportunities one brick at a time. At the tip of Africa there is a place where over 213 000 housing opportunities have been created since 2009, directly benefiting some 850 000 people.

Following the successful Conradie Park development, which is now in Phase 2, the year ahead will see a further 1 225 residential units completed, bringing safe and dignified housing to more families.

Apex Education has partnered with the developers of the Conradie Project, to build a new school, Apex Pinelands. New Permanent classrooms will open this year, giving learners a well-resourced environment to learn and succeed. This was facilitated by Edu Invest, a catalytic project powered by Wesgro and the Western Cape Government, which attracts investment into education.

Speaker, the national Minister of Land Reform and Rural Development has committed to the next phase of District Six in partnership with the City of Cape Town. This is long overdue. I have invited the Minister to visit the Conradie Park site, as it should be the inspiration for the revitalisation of District 6.

The Western Cape Government is actively bringing residents close to economic opportunities in the Cape Town city centre.

A sale and development agreement is now in place to provide approximately 341 social housing opportunities at Leeuloop with construction commencing later this year.

And we are making progress with Founders' Garden, which will offer as many as 1 178 social housing opportunities.

In 2025, we delivered over 1000 finance-linked individual subsidies (FLISP) for first time home buyers who earn less than R22,000 a month, providing more affordable access to housing. This year, we will triple these subsidies, providing more than 3000 residents with their own homes.

Nearby, the Ebenhaezer Housing Project in Bitou is well underway, with the first phase delivering 204 housing opportunities. Subsequent phases will deliver 1 433 housing opportunities, bringing dignity and opportunity to this Garden Route community.

We cannot talk about infrastructure here in George without acknowledging the horrific 2024 building collapse. I can now confirm that the SAPS have completed their investigation into all aspects of this disaster including the peer-reviewed report that we handed to the SAPS in early 2025. The case docket is now with the NPA for a decision on prosecution.

Speaker, after two years, it is time for justice to be seen.

Roads

At the tip of Africa there is a place with roads that are well-maintained and the envy of other provinces.

In 2025, 24 549km of gravel roads were maintained; and 269 000m² of surfaced roads resealed.

All these roads projects translate into jobs. 4 645 work opportunities were created last year.

We will keep on investing in our roads, with over 2 275 000 m² of road set for maintenance this year, creating thousands more work opportunities.

Our infrastructure push this year will gather more momentum with several flagship projects such as the R11 billion N1 Wingfield Southern Upgrade Scheme, the R300 Ring Road and the George Western Bypass.

Safety on our roads is critically important which is why our Provincial Law Enforcement teams can be seen working hard across the province. In February alone, there have been more than 450 integrated vehicle check points with over 70,000 vehicles checked.

I can also announce that this year we will be procuring two highly advanced vehicle scanners which will be used at check points

across the province to monitor for hidden drugs and firearms, and victims of human trafficking.

We are all responsible for road safety. Every time anyone gets behind a wheel, it should be with the utmost care and with full recognition of the lifechanging impact of our choices as drivers.

At the tip of Africa there is a place where provincial law enforcement is protecting key industries, such as agriculture.

Agriculture

Agriculture in the Western Cape is responsible for about 21% of national employment in this sector. Both agriculture and agri-processing combined contributed over 250 000 jobs last year, 9% higher than the previous year.

In 2025, the provincial Department of Agriculture, led by Minister Ivan Meyer, has continued to increase our exports that now go to 78 countries. Our province now account for 58% of South Africa's total agricultural exports.

A local business, Montseng Taste Buds, has been supported by the Department's incubation programme and partnered with Makers

Landing in the Waterfront. The company has grown exponentially because of this programme and support.

The ecological infrastructure project, incorporating river protection works and invasive alien clearing, has rehabilitated 16 000 hectares of land which has the potential to augment 113 million cubic metres of water supply. This is the equivalent capacity of the Berg River Dam.

Speaker, biosecurity threats and disasters, such as Foot-and-Mouth Disease, pose a serious risk to our farmers and the Western Cape's economic growth and trade competitiveness. We welcome the classification of FMD as a disaster and must work at speed to protect the province's herd. I am receiving daily updates from the JOC and leading weekly meetings with all district municipalities. We have rolled out vehicle check points across 13 municipalities, and contained all confirmed outbreaks. So far, 12,000 vaccines have been administered across the province, with over 7,500 animals vaccinated in informal settlements along the Garden Route this past weekend. 30,000 additional doses of vaccine are on their way to the province from national government. This will be scaled up

over the coming weeks and we will work to ensure that the Western Cape is given its fair share of vaccines.

We welcome the National Agriculture Minister's commitment to vaccinating the country's herd and look forward to working closely and collaboratively to get every animal in the Western Cape vaccinated, to protect this critical industry and jobs.

Speaker, our environment is precious. Whether it be natural wide-open spaces, farmland, or our inner-city waterways.

Climate change and Environmental Affairs

Addressing climate change is not only an environmental priority, but also an economic imperative. We see the impact of this crisis every year - Bridges washed away and roads damaged in floods, homes and hectares of farmland and fynbos destroyed by wildfires - the impact and reach of the climate crisis extends far and wide, across our province and economy touching lives and livelihoods.

Climate change knows no borders; it does not keep to timetables. Each year, its impact becomes more evident in the heavy rains, storm surges, flooding, heat waves, and now, as we are seeing some regions, drought. Over the last 2 months we have seen areas

go from being ravaged by wildfires to washed out by rainstorms. These extreme weather events are driven by climate change. This crisis is undeniable.

There are some brilliant organisations supporting communities to become resilient in the face of our changing climate. The Greater Overberg Fire Protection Association supports communities and organisations to develop fire plans and manage risk. Manager Louise Wessels is here. Good Evening, Ma'am. Thank you for your incredible work.

I would also like to recognise the Mossel Bay and Garden Route JOC and all the firefighters of this region who spent so much time protecting lives and fighting the devastating fires this year.

Water

This region, like many others across our province, is facing serious water security challenges. And just as we acted with urgency to overcome load shedding, we are bringing that same vigour, focus, and energy to securing our water future.

At the tip of Africa there is a place that is on track to secure an additional 310 million cubic metres of water by 2035.

To conserve this precious resource, we have invested over R250 million that has enabled local government investment into water infrastructure amounting to billions.

For example, The Plettenberg Bay desalination plant has been working all through the holiday season to keep the economy going and George has invested in a new water and sewerage system.

The Departments of Local Government, and Environmental Affairs and Development Planning, under the leadership of Minister Anton Bredell, are working with stakeholders in every sphere of government to achieve our bold water resilience goals.

The raising of the Clanwilliam dam wall is well underway and once complete will add 69.5 million cubic metres of water to the system per year. This will enable investment into thousands of hectares of new agricultural land and give water security to the towns downstream for years to come.

We are assisting municipalities with large infrastructure projects such as pipeline upgrades in Overstrand, reservoir construction in Saldanha Bay and increasing treatment capacity of the water treatment works in Voelvlei, Swartland.

Through our steady and consistent investment in our disaster management network, we have built up a world-class system that can respond to each disaster speedily and professionally.

Fires

Fire seasons are getting longer and more costly. The Department of Local Government, Environmental Affairs and Development Planning invested over R30 million last year into fire service augmentation and aerial firefighting resources. With 27 helicopters and spotter planes on standby during the season, the aerial firefighting capacity of the province is powerful. We have also enabled the purchase of high-impact firefighting vehicles in the Swartland and Bitou Local Municipalities, and the Garden Route District municipality.

97% of all wildfires are started by humans, either through negligence or intentionality. Arson suspects have been arrested in Drakenstein and Overstrand Municipality for fires in those areas. Anyone suspected of starting a wildfire will face the full might of the law.

Disaster management is made possible by some of the bravest and most dedicated people you will ever meet. Whether they are

“bombing” fires from the air, responding to floods, or helping to rescue people in natural or manmade disasters, these women and men are the first to arrive at the scenes and the last to leave.

In the wake of some of the worst fires the province has seen in years, I would like to recognise the incredible work of the Overberg Fire Services. Tonight we have the Overberg Fire Chief here, Mr Reinhard Geldenhuys. Sir, thank you and every single one of your team members for your incredible dedication.

Thanks to your coordinated efforts, the town of Elim and the De Kop informal settlement in Overstrand were saved.

This is just one example of the incredible efforts during this fire season. A huge thanks goes to every single person in the province who has played a role in battling the fires, particularly those in the Cederberg, Mossel Bay, Franschhoek, Du Noon, Masiphumelele and Caledon.

Energy

At the tip of Africa, there is a place driving energy security for its residence. In the 2025/26 financial year, our Department of Local

Government committed R46million to enhance municipal energy security in the Western Cape.

Through our provincial Energy Resilience Programme, 819 MW has been added to the provincial grid in the 2024/25 financial year, with another 1 000 MW anticipated in this year.

The power landscape is changing in the Western Cape and we are less reliant on Eskom as more and more independent power producers (IPPs) come online.

Speaker, in the same way that we have addressed our energy challenges, we are seized with another challenge. That is the Safety of our residents.

Safety

The heinous crimes that take place daily are eating away at the fabric of our society.

Imagine the anxiety for a mother who is waiting for her child to get home as the sun begins to set. Imagine school children walking past bullet-riddled bodies. This is the norm for far too many. But it is so, so, so abnormal.

I would like to ask a moment of silence for all the innocent residents - men, women and children - injured or killed at the hands of criminals.

The levels of violence in our province, and across the entire country, are literally turning many communities into war-zones with long-term consequences that fuel substance abuse, affect our literacy levels, fuel unemployment, and impact mental health. The daily struggle for dignity and opportunity amid gang gunfire is a national shame.

The cost of crime in South Africa is immense. The entire country is grappling with this cancer, with over 345 people murdered in the Western Cape in January alone.

Over the last 30 years, there has been absolutely no real or meaningful investment in safety from national government. No new prisons. No new court houses. No upgrading of the criminal justice system, and a complete failure by senior SAPS management to address the situation.

While we are cautiously supportive of the military deployment, it is surely an admission of the SAPS leadership's failure to combat crime effectively.

I have held a number of meetings with acting Police Minister Firoz Cachalia to request his interventions to ensure proper resourcing and SAPS reforms, including changes to regulations to allow local law enforcement to investigate crimes. The Minister must act now.

If we do not see movement and change, we will be left with no option but to approach the courts to get SAPS to do more.

For 2025/2026, the SAPS' budget is in excess of R120 billion. It should be way more. At the moment, this funds fewer police officers now than ever before.

And yet we, the Western Cape Government contribute more in one year to local law enforcement initiatives such as LEAP than the SAPS has allocated for its Anti-Gang Unit in five years.

How can it be that the SAPS VIP Protection budget is over R4 billion a year, solely to protect politicians, while the anti-gang unit's operational budget is around R30 million a year?

The SAPS is currently the only law enforcement agency that can investigate crimes. So, even if municipal and provincial law enforcements arrest a suspect, only SAPS can build a case to ensure a conviction.

Recently, I visited the Kraaifontein station, which is one of the most violent precincts in the country.

There are 30 detectives and they all share one desktop computer.

There is only one central email address and it's on a computer in a often-locked office.

None of the detectives have an official cellphone or computer, making it almost impossible for victims of crime to their investigating officer.

These detectives are investigating 150 dockets each.

They are setup to fail. This picture is repeated at many other stations, like Khayelitsha and Mitchells Plain.

This is why we will be funding two lawyers to support detectives at the Mitchells Plain Police Station to ensure strong dockets are produced that result in convictions. This follows the successful pilot of this at the Grassy Park police station.

And while our population continues to grow the number of SAPS officers continues to decline.

This negligence is utterly nefarious and as the Premier of this province I find myself questioning how this situation exists every day. How can it be that those responsible for addressing crime and corruption do not tackle this problem with proper budgets and leadership?

But there are many honest SAPS members in this province, of all ranks, who do what they can every day to fight crime. This situation is not their fault.

The lifestyle audits of top cops, which we have been calling for years, recently announced by the President, must be rolled out immediately. Every rotten police officer must be removed.

Local Policing and Provincial Law Enforcement

We are doing everything within our mandate to address crime, both in terms of prevention and reduction.

Many residents have critical information about gangster and drug activity going on in their communities, but have no safe way to share the information, without compromising their safety. If we want

to stop gangsterism and violent crime, then we need to create a safe way for people to provide information. We are giving them the platform to do so, safely.

To that end, I am glad to announce a further partnership with the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organised Crime who already do excellent work producing the Western Cape Gang Monitor.

Together, we are establishing a Gang Observatory to facilitate the flow of anonymised information to law enforcement agencies so we put these gangsters, extortionists and drug dealers behind bars.

Over the last term, our Police Oversight and Community Safety Ministry, led by Minister Anroux Marais, has demonstrated that a new, data-driven and technology-enabled model of policing can make real change in people's lives. Where our 994 LEAP Officers are deployed, we typically see decreases in murder, and initiatives like ShotSpotter have helped us to target violent criminals and arrest them.

Our K9 units are fully operational in Mossel Bay, Overstrand and Swartland, with plans to expand into Stellenbosch this year. These

units support other law enforcement agencies in combatting drug trafficking, illegal firearms and the transport of stolen or illicit goods.

This past year, our Law Enforcement Support Programme which focuses on rural safety saw law enforcement and peace officers deployed to Laingsburg, Cederberg, Bergrivier, Hessequa, Oudtshoorn, Drakenstein, Stellenbosch, Matzikama and right here in George. This year, the programme will expand to a further seven municipalities. Since 2022/23, 528 law enforcement and police officers have been deployed to 24 municipalities across the province.

Our provincial safety personnel often work alongside neighbourhood watch groups, private security, community policing forums and farm patrols. We owe a massive debt of gratitude to the thousands of men and women who form part of community safety groups across the province. You are our eyes and ears while many of us are inside our homes or at work. Thank you for your sacrifice, your courage and your dedication.

Tonight, Mr Rupert Pretorius is here. Rupert is the coordinator of all 18 neighbourhood watches that fall in the George SAPS station area and has been involved with NHW since 2013. During this year

he has been involved in solving several crimes across numerous precincts.

We have to prove to our youth that there are ways out of poverty that don't force you to surrender your life to drugs, violence, and gangs.

Violence prevention, in safety terms, focuses on proactive programmes that address the root causes of crime and intervene early to prevent harm before it occurs. It's about working with young people to give them options beyond a life on the streets. It's about working with mothers at risk to support them and their children. It's about providing the best possible learning and upskilling opportunities, coping mechanisms and caring support and mentorship.

Chrysalis Academy is an incredible programme that has helped thousands of youth break free from unemployment and step into a world of opportunity and purpose. Thousands of young people from vulnerable communities have benefited, with many going on to permanent employment. Just like a caterpillar develops into a butterfly, the Chrysalis Academy is uplifting young residents out of hopelessness into a future they can believe in.

I would like to thank the retired CEO of Chrysalis Dr Lucille Meyer for her incredible work. You have changed so many lives.

We must create hope, and we must create it here, in our province. Once again, this is not an easy task. National unemployment figures are deeply concerning with many people losing hope of finding work. We refuse to let that happen here.

The Western Cape Government is pioneering Planet Youth, an internationally recognised prevention model that supports young people to reduce substance use and avoid other high risk behaviours, strengthening protective factors in families, schools, and communities.

The programme was first piloted in George in 2022, where Grade 8 and 9 learners from George, Uniondale and Haarlem were surveyed. Planet Youth aims to better understand young residents' lived experiences and the protective factors in their lives that would support them in making healthier choices.

This is the most comprehensive study of its kind in South Africa, and it aims to inform programmes addressed at diverting young people away from crime.

Following the success of the pilot, Planet Youth has been scaled up across other parts of the province, led by the Western Cape Department of Health and Wellness, under the leadership of Minister Mireille Wenger.

To date, 49 094 learners across 123 schools have been surveyed in three districts: the Cape Metro, West Coast and Garden Route. This provides a robust, representative picture of the lived experiences of young people in communities home to approximately 1.8 million residents.

In the audience, we have Amyoli Jansen and her mother, Mrs Noxolo Jansen. Amyoli is a Planet Youth Ambassador. Leading from the front, this remarkable young person is a role model for our children. Welcome Amyoli and Noxolo.

The Western Cape Government is for you, at every stage of life, designing and delivering programmes that nurture strong beginnings, empower young people to grow into healthy, capable adults, and support residents to grow older with dignity, security, and peace of mind.

EHACS

In 2025, the Western Cape Department of Health and Wellness, launched Khulisa Care (meaning “to grow” in isiXhosa), a pilot programme aimed at reducing malnutrition and stunting in early childhood. The programme is implemented in partnership with the private sector, non-profit organisations and academic institutions.

Through this pilot, the department provides monthly nutrition vouchers to undernourished pregnant women and mothers of low-birth-weight babies in the Breede Valley, Khayelitsha and Mitchells Plain. This forms part of the support provided by the department for the first 1 000 days of a child’s life.

In addition to food support, participating mothers receive increased support from trained community health workers, who provide guidance on nutrition, breastfeeding, maternal mental health and navigating the health system.

Even the President has finally recognised the devastating impact that stunting and malnutrition has in South Africa. We stand ready to support any national effort to roll this programme out.

Khulisa Care recognises that investing in early childhood is not only a health intervention, but also an intervention in enabling a child to develop the nutritional foundation they need to reach their full potential. Malnourished mothers and stunted babies are more likely drop out of school to earn less and remaining trapped in a cycle of poverty and ill-health.

The Khulisa Care pilot will continue in 2026. The Department will closely monitor participating mothers and their babies to assess the impact of the intervention on nutrition, early development, and stunting outcomes, with a view to informing future scale-up and long-term policy decisions. When children begin life with strong foundations of nutrition, stimulation and care, they have a much better chance of succeeding at school and into adulthood.

Education

Education is the key to independence, economic inclusion and employment. Under the leadership of Education Minister David Maynier, we are building schools faster than most other provinces combined.

That's because we take this challenge very seriously building more schools, more innovatively and rapidly than ever before. Nine new schools have opened in the last year with two more opening in a phased approach in due course. All these schools are in high demand communities in Cape Town, and along the Garden Route.

In readiness for the 2026 school year, we have added another 175 new classrooms to our schools.

The Western Cape Education Department will invest R1.5 billion in new schools and classrooms this year, with 15 new schools under construction. School Governing Bodies will also build an additional 21 classrooms at existing schools.

We have just under 1500 schools in the province and we're adding all the time. It won't be long before we have another combined 100 schools in our public and private system.

The Western Cape Government also provides over 550,000 learners with a free meal every single school day. A learner with a full stomach is more likely to stay in school and go on to become a healthy, independent, working adult.

A 2021 study found that more than 80% of South Africa's grade 4 pupils cannot read for meaning. But, the Western Cape Education Department is bucking this trend through innovation and agility.

The #BackOnTrack programme provides learners with additional academic support but also offers a unique opportunity for learners from different schools to come together and learn in a new environment. Last year the programme was rolled out to 20 700 learners and offered training to over 2400 teachers.

And I'm delighted to say that the #BackOnTrack programme is working, which will keep more children in school and out of a life of poverty. In 2025, over 91 000 Grade 3 learners wrote the independently administered annual systemic tests for Mathematics and Language. They achieved their highest results ever.

Since 2021, the mathematics pass rate has increased from 44.3% to 62%. The language pass rate has increased from 36.9% to 51.2%.

A structured language programme has been operating in all primary schools since 2024. Teachers in Grades 1 to 3 were trained in the science of reading, and teacher and learner support materials were provided to all our schools. And we added extra

time for reading and mathematics within the current school day for all learners in Grades 1 to 3.

Our Matrics did us proud once again! The class of 2025 delivered the Western Cape's best ever matric pass at 88.2%, and best ever bachelor's pass rate at 49.2%.

Learners with Special Education Needs (LSEN) scored a matric pass rate of 91.9%. Jan Kriel School in Cape Town produced the top LSEN learner in the country, Takunda Muchuweni.

Abigail Kok was recently named the top NSC learner in the country after completing her matric right here in George at York High School. The school principal, Mr. Francois Moll, is also with us here this evening. Welcome and thank you for all that you do for our young residents. You and your school are symbols of how education can transform lives.

Our Education Department commits to excellence and works tirelessly to deliver excellence.

Take Silikamva High School, which achieved a 100% pass rate for the first time in its history, and a bachelor's pass rate of 76%.

The Principal is here tonight, Mrs Siphathisiwe Nkala-Nkohla. Welcome, Ma'am. Your leadership is a shining light in our province.

DSD

Speaker, GBV has been declared a national disaster with women and girls deeply impacted by this scourge. We are actively working to address this and provide the necessary support.

The GBV Ambassador Programme is being steadily implemented across the Western Cape by Social Development Minister Jaco Londt and his department. These volunteers – all 860 of them and counting - have put up their hands to help us raise awareness around the scourge of GBV. Minister Londt and his Department team plan to expand the ambassador programme this year and increase the number of capacity-building sessions for all ambassadors.

21 GBV Ambassador programmes are currently operating across the province including in the Karoo, Berg River, Cape Town, Cape Winelands, Overberg, Paarl, Stellenbosch, Breede Valley, Atlantis, and right here in the Garden Route.

Tonight, I would like to welcome Ms. Linda Smit who is a GBV Ambassador and one of my guests. Linda is a heroic survivor of gender-based violence and is determined to use her voice in raising awareness about the importance of education and prevention. Thank you so much for all that you do, Linda.

The Western Cape Government employs approximately 1000 social workers who work with thousands of our residents.

We also fund 27 shelters for survivors of GBV. These safe, supportive environments allow survivors to rebuild and re-establish their independence. Last year, shelter services were accessed by 1,584 women and children.

To boost NGO resilience, the DSD launched the Cape Care fund in June 2025, partnering with the Health Foundation. Funds raised will go towards ensuring the sustainability of beneficiary NGOs across the province.

Where social workers struggle to reach communities in remote parts of the province, we took to the road with our mobile social development offices covering over 60,000km a month. Through this

programme, last year we reached hundreds of residents in remote areas.

Our committed social workers provide essential support to vulnerable individuals, advocate for children's rights and protection, and help families access vital services such as healthcare, and social grants. They bridge gaps between communities and government systems. Their work not only offers immediate relief but also promotes long-term resilience, helping to build safer, healthier, and more stable communities.

Over the next year, DSD will pilot an independent living programme aimed at young people who have turned 18 and have to exit child and youth care centres and the foster care system. This programme aims to address a critical gap in support for these youth leaving care by providing a safe space to build resilience and independence as they begin their adult lives.

The Social Work Integrated Management System (SWIMS) App is another incredible innovation that facilitates digital client files, including AI speech to text. This supports better compliance with social work norms and standards and reduces admin time, allowing social workers to spend more time engaging with residents.

DCAS

Cultural Affairs and Sports Minister, Ricardo Mackenzie and his department have strengthened and expanded the MOD Programme, our Mass participation, Opportunity and access, Development and Growth programme, so that more young people have access to safe, structured after school spaces guided by caring adults and positive role models. This is another way we are working to prevent our young people from getting caught up in criminal networks.

This term we have grown the MOD Programme from 181 centres to 315 centres across the Western Cape. This is not growth for the sake of numbers. And as we move forward, our ambition is clear. We will scale this platform to 500 centres so that no child's opportunity depends on their postcode.

In 2025 alone, MOD delivered through 55 centres here in the Garden Route, reaching 13 774 learners. This is early intervention at scale, supporting learners where the foundations of lifelong discipline, confidence and belonging are built.

The Western Cape is the only province to reverse youth unemployment between 2021 - 2024. While we have done better

than any other province in turning the tide, we still have a long way to go.

YearBeyond continues to provide opportunities for youth to gain work experience while serving their communities and we are delighted to report that 3 250 youth were given such opportunities, over 500 of them right here in this region.

Tonight we have two YearBeyond graduates –YeBoneers - in the audience.

Lisakhanya Pendu has been granted a bursary from her employer to study environmental sciences, bringing her one step closer to her 10-year dream of establishing an NGO that focuses on water resilience. In her words YearBeyond helped her find her authentic self and voice. Welcome, Lisakhanya, and power to you!

Batya Cele was a teen mom who refused to give up. She is the manager of the YearBeyond Planet Youth Programme and its work with adolescents in George. Wow, Batya, you are an inspiration. Welcome and thank you!

While gaining work experience, the participants are increasing the protective factors for the next generation by supporting children

and learners to read, by assisting with life skills and by equipping caregivers to connect with their children.

Health

At the tip of the Africa there is a place where R2.4 billion is being invested in new and improved health facilities over three years.

Last year 45 health infrastructure projects were under construction, 30 of which will be completed this year. This massive push is set to improve access to healthcare for residents across the province.

These projects span the full health system, from clinic upgrades and hospital expansions to specialised mental health facilities, strengthening access to care across the province.

R255 million is being invested in the expansion of the Groote Schuur Hospital Emergency Centre, one of the busiest emergency centres in Africa, improving capacity, patient flow and safety for both patients and staff.

Three new acute psychiatric units will be added to existing regional hospitals this year including an additional adolescent ward at Lentegeur Hospital which was completed last year. This will add 100

beds to the mental health system, which remains under immense pressure.

63 new mobile clinics hit the road in 2025 replacing an ageing fleet and bringing services directly into communities.

Tonight we have sister Elizabeth Braaf in the audience, one of the nurses who helped design these incredible mobile clinics. Sister Braaf, you have been instrumental in taking healthcare to the most remote communities in our province. Thank you so much.

Planning is underway for the redevelopment of Tygerberg Hospital, the second largest hospital in South Africa. This is a once-in-a-generation undertaking that will change the very foundations of the public healthcare system in the Western Cape and we must get it right. As the planning and behind the scenes work continues to make this a reality, the Western Cape Government is getting ready - having invested R35 million in two new industrial warehouses for linen and consumables at Tygerberg, ensuring rapid and efficient material support to our hospital network.

In 2026, the Department will make significant progress with facilities in Hanover Park, Knysna and Mossel Bay. With nearly R500 million set

aside for these projects, the facilities will take health services right to communities who need them most.

Artificial intelligence is transforming medicine worldwide, creating powerful opportunities to improve both the quality and accessibility of healthcare.

In Khayelitsha, diabetes is a significant public health challenge. Local health facilities see very high rates of diabetes and as a result, serious eye conditions including diabetic retinopathy. This places considerable pressure on specialist eye care services.

Through the introduction of AI-enabled retinal screening, staff at four primary healthcare clinics in Khayelitsha have been trained to capture retinal images. These images are analysed using an AI diagnostic tool with clinical reasoning, which provides an assessment of the likelihood and severity of conditions like diabetic retinopathy. Patients requiring urgent care are booked immediately with a specialist.

As a diabetic myself, I made use of this service and was so impressed by the level of expertise and innovative technology.

At Groote Schuur Hospital, in partnership with the University of Cape Town, the Department is introducing an AI-powered CT brain imaging system to support faster and more accurate stroke diagnosis and treatment. Strokes remain one of the leading causes of disability, and when it comes to treatment, every minute matters.

This technology enables clinicians to analyse brain scans almost instantly, improving diagnostic speed and accuracy so that treatment can begin sooner. Earlier intervention significantly improves outcomes, helping to protect speech, movement, independence and lives.

What makes this innovation especially powerful is its ability to connect clinical teams across multiple hospitals, including Mitchells Plain, New Somerset, Victoria and George. Through a secure tele-stroke platform, specialists can collaborate in real time, ensuring expert input is available even when patients are far from tertiary centres.

This technology does not replace doctors. It strengthens them by providing faster information, better decision support and access to remote specialist expertise where needed.

Local Government

This year I cannot talk about the state of the province without mentioning the upcoming local government elections. Citizens have an opportunity to make their mark and improve their lives.

We have over 500 political parties in South Africa. When I look at the performance of all municipalities, there is such vast disparity in the quality of services delivered, and often these align to the make up of the municipal leadership.

You can be in one town, where rubbish is collected, leaks are fixed, roads are maintained and the lights are on. You drive 60km and you're in a different town which resembles a war zone – rubbish everywhere, water leaks in every street, and in some cases, no water in taps for weeks on end.

Just down the road, Knysna is facing a water crisis. The Western Cape Government has offered support through many interventions and even funded some of the critical work with provincial funds.

We also tried to place the town under administration, but this was rejected by national parliament saying that all was under control.

Well, the exact opposite is the case and things are only getting worse.

I would like to acknowledge the efforts of Ministers Baartman and Bredell in working tirelessly with struggling municipalities.

There are municipalities where the wrong choices were made at the last election. And the costs have been great. It is a management problem. Mistakes last 5 years and much damage can be done in that time. It also takes far longer to fix than to break.

Speaker, as the Western Cape Provincial Parliament, let us go out and encourage our residents to participate in our hard-earned democracy, because every vote matters.

What really inspires me is when municipalities innovate and prioritise service delivery.

The Hessequa Municipality is an example. The council took incredible initiative in successfully bidding for a Solar PV and Battery Storage project, which received a total allocation of R173 million over three financial years. Later this year, I will help flick the switch on this project, which will essentially see the town of Riversdale

become independent of Eskom for its growing power needs and the first town in South Africa to do so.

The Breed Valley Municipality built 3 massive new reservoirs in Worcester which will support their water resilience for many years to come.

The City of Cape Town is spending more money on infrastructure than ever before. Major pipelines and roadways carrying services to and from new, existing and growing suburbs. The City is also about to put out two tenders for a reuse water plant and desalination site. These will be the biggest of their kind on the African continent.

CONCLUSION

Last year, I asked each of us to step up, and the last year has seen this government, do exactly that. Now, it is time to build on that momentum. It is time to move forward like never before; to get things done!

At the tip of Africa there is a place where kindness is second nature. The people I meet and engage with, the warmth and generosity I see remind me of what makes this province of ours the remarkable

place that it is – our kindness and get it done spirit are what sets us apart from the negativity we are sadly seeing across the world.

Even small acts of kindness – a resident offering bottled water and eye drops to firefighters on the frontlines, a social worker who refuses to give up in helping those most in need, a nurse who, despite working a full shift chooses to stay on duty to help her colleagues, a teacher who goes above and beyond to ensure their learners get top marks, and a neighbourhood watch member who thinks nothing of giving their time to help keep their community safe.

We are taking action now to create our growth, our prosperity and our success. We are not called a place of hope for nothing.

If the decade so far has taught me anything, it is that, despite challenges and hardships, the people of the Western Cape still believe in our vision of success. They, with us, still dare to hope for that simple success of a dignified life lived to its fullest.

This is a province where bold ideas are nurtured and given expression through our enduring commitment to our residents. This is a region where trust has been earned through hard work. But

even as we have set a high standard, we must be determined to enable more of our residents to step up and out of poverty into a world of opportunity and hope.

At the tip of Africa there is a place where we innovate, where we do whatever we can to look out for our fellow residents, and where we grow together toward a brighter future.

At the tip of Africa there is a place that is increasingly rich in jobs and opportunities. It is a place in which the beauty of the landscape is rivalled only by the hard work and kindness of its people.

It is a place where we will be spending 2026 getting to work and getting it done.

It is a place called the Western Cape.