

Thousands support 702's Tax Break campaign

Ten thousand South Africans, including Safety and Security Minister, Charles Nqakula, support Talk Radio 702 and its efforts to have payouts to families of slain police officers exempt from being taxed. This emerged after Talk Radio 702's morning show host, John Robbie, called on listeners to show their support for a change in the law that currently allows for the taxing of payouts to the families of police officers killed in the line of duty.



Talk Radio 702 morning show host John Robbie, show technical controller Darius Mothibe and the 10 000 petitions

"We have been overwhelmed by listener response to this campaign," says Talk Radio 702 station manager, Pheladi Gwangwa. "Each and every petition entry had to be accompanied by the supporter's name, surname, ID number and a line detailing their support. The fact that 10 000 people took the time to do this, either of their own accord or through the amazing efforts of people who care enough to want to make a difference, was just staggering."

Following the horrific Jeppestown massacre in July 2006 that claimed the lives of four police officers, it became evident that the payouts their families would receive would be taxed. Upon hearing this, Robbie decided to take the matter further, and launched the Tax Break campaign.

Mobilise the public

The campaign sought to mobilise the public to register their support for tax breaks for the families of slain police officers in the form of a petition. This was done via simple mechanics: the Talk Radio 702 website (www.702.co.za), through a dedicated fax, sms and email facility, as well as by hand-written letters posted to the station.

After just four weeks, 10 000 messages of support have been received. Most interesting, though, has been the way in which the messages reached the station. The majority have been individual messages, sent via the channels provided. But the feedback factor of the campaign means that many messages have been sent in by people who have taken it upon themselves to garner support for the campaign.

In some instances, managers of private companies have encouraged their staff to participate en masse, while in other cases, entire departments - including police stations - have registered their support.

Gwangwa adds that people outside the station's traditional listening area have also participated, indicating the wide appeal of this somewhat emotional campaign.

"We've received messages of support from all over the country, which has been very encouraging. People obviously feel that they would like to make a difference in the lives of our police men and women, but maybe didn't know how to do this. Talk Radio 702 has now given them that opportunity, and we plan to do everything we can to change this law."

High profile

The campaign also caught the eye of several high-profile leaders, including the Minister of Safety and Security, Charles Nqakula. "I'm very happy that people are paying attention to this particular matter, which has been troubling us since we launched these payouts," Nqakula told listeners on-air in an interview with Robbie.

"We approached the National Treasury on this issue in the very beginning, and I know that at the level of the minister, there is sympathy towards this cause. We support the Tax Break campaign whole-heartedly."

Adviser to the Tax Break campaign, Ernie Lai King, director and head of tax services at Deneys Reitz, has formally received the volumes of petitions, and will now present the case to the National Treasury and the Office of the Commissioner for the SA Revenue Service. "There is a lot of bureaucratic red tape to get through, as with the proposed change of any law," says Lai King. "But I'm optimistic of the success of this campaign."

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