

Joemat-Peterssen faces probe calls over PetroSA

Opposition parties have called on the public protector and Parliament's joint committee on ethics and members' interests to investigate Energy Minister Tina Joemat-Peterssen, for misleading the public over her role in the appointment of PetroSA chair Tshepo Kgadima...



Energy Minister Tina Joemat-Peterssen: Did she mislead the public over her role in the appointment of PetroSA chair Tshepo Kgadima? (Image: GCIS)

Democratic Alliance shadow energy minister Lance Greyling said Joemat-Peterssen had been "caught misleading" the National Assembly and must be suspended and investigated by Parliament's joint committee on ethics and members' interests as it probes "allegations of misconduct and contempt of Parliament".

Freedom Front Plus (FF+) parliamentary spokesman on energy Anton Alberts said yesterday that he would ask the public protector "to investigate the circumstances surrounding the appointment of PetroSA's new chairperson".

Documentation shows she did recommend Kgadima for the position

Kgadima has been accused of swindling more than 250 investors who put money into his company, LontohCoal, for mine projects that did not exist. One of his alleged victims is former minister Zola Skweyiya who says he has been trying for two years to get back the R1m he put into Kgadima's investment scheme.

Last week, when pressed to answer during a debate in the National Assembly about why she had hired "corrupt people" and an "alleged fraudster", Joemat-Peterssen said the appointment of the chairman was the responsibility of the board of PetroSA's holding company, the Central Energy Fund, and was not a Cabinet decision.

Contrary to her denials, documentation seen by *Business Day* shows Joemat-Peterssen recommended Kgadima to serve as chair of PetroSA.

Alberts said the position of PetroSA chair "is of the greatest strategic interest to SA's energy industry and viewed against the background of the allegations, it is of the greatest interest that the PP (public protector) investigates all relevant aspects surrounding the appointment".

"The FF+ will be asking the public protector to, among others, establish whether the correct procedures had been followed in the appointment and whether Kgadima is suitable for the position," said Alberts.

A lack of ethics

It is not just opposition parties that are concerned.

Yesterday, the African National Congress (ANC) said the problems in the country's state-owned entities were a concern for its national executive committee, which met at the weekend. The party's top leaders decided to establish a task team to report back to the ANC on the state of parastatals.

Alberts said the FF+ had been contacted by a business that lost R10m when it agreed to sell mineral rights to Kgadima's LontohCoal, after a contract was not honoured.

Greyling said the recommendation of Kgadima by Joemat-Peterssen was worrying as it raised questions about her judgment.

"There are two things here; she was particularly disingenuous when she answered my question on Friday.

"She said she was not responsible for the appointment, which clearly is not the case. The second thing is her judgment. I question her judgment, why would she recommend someone with these allegations to the board?" asked Greyling.

It was "not difficult", he said, to see why Joemat-Peterssen would have wanted to conceal her involvement in Kgadima's appointment.

"His appointment is irrational and must be set aside," Greyling added.

The last person to be sanctioned by Parliament's ethics committee was former communications minister Dina Pule, who had to deliver a five-minute apology in the National Assembly in August last year. She was found guilty of transgressing the parliamentary ethics code.

When an MP is found guilty of transgression Parliament's code of conduct the ethics committee must recommend the imposition of one or more of the following penalties: a reprimand in the National Assembly; a fine not exceeding the value of 30 days' salary; a reduction of salary or allowances for a period not exceeding 30 days; or the suspension of certain privileges or a member's right to a seat in parliamentary debates or committees for a period not exceeding 30 days.

If the committee considers a breach to be minor, the member may be ordered to rectify it and counselled on the requirements of the code.

Phone calls seeking comment from the Department of Energy went unanswered yesterday.

Source: *Business Day*, via I-Net Bridge

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