

Open letter to parliamentarians ahead of Sona

YOU MAY HAVE seen us on your Twitter feeds recently, and I hope you don't think we were stalking you.

We have set ourselves a task to post on as many of your timelines as possible, asking that you wear an outfit designed and made here in South Africa when you step into the National Assembly chamber on Thursday evening for the President's State of the Nation Address.

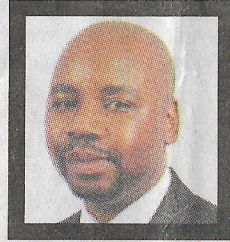
The President himself set the example on the occasion of his June 2019 speech and even went as far as to mention the SA factory where the workers that made his suit, shirt and tie are employed. We have heard that the President will once again fly our clothing manufacturing flag high on Thursday and will be attired in a locally made suit.

He was, however, more reticent to mention the provenance of other more personal items of clothing! We have decided to help him with that and have sent him – and in an Oprah moment, have also sent to each of the gentlemen members of parliament – a pair of locally designed and manufactured socks.

Many of you will have heard of Sibusiso Ngwenya, perhaps better known by his brand, Skinny Sbu Socks. His journey as an entrepreneur has been well documented, often by himself on his own social media platforms.

Sbu can personally attest to the

PROUDLY SA



EUSTACE MASHIMBYE

trials and tribulations that many small businesses go through from inception to profitability.

He is now in the position of having a moderately successful company, supplying to one of our major retailers and he can reasonably claim to be supporting around 1 000 direct and indirect employees. These include those working in design and research, in the actual manufacturing of the socks and those people employed by his transport and logistics service provider.

So please, gentlemen, wear your Skinny Sbu Socks with pride on Thursday. You can collect them from today from the GCIS office in parliament and they will assist you with the declaration formalities.

And ladies, we have not left you out.

We thought hard about what we could give to the female members of parliament, bearing in mind that you will all be wearing something specially chosen, we hope from an SA designer – most often in bright, vibrant South African colours, and carefully accessorised.

So as not to clash with any of the above, we have had lovely hand-beaded bracelets especially made for you, which we hope you will wear on Thursday. They are each threaded by women who are part of a network of crafters associated with Western Cape-based company Essay Gifts. They provide work to many unskilled and semi-skilled women from the vulnerable informal sector, often overlooked by traditional job-creation schemes.

Assisting their contracted workers to reach the highest quality standards, Essay Gifts' catalogue of handcrafted and unique ideas each comes with its own story (or "essay").

I don't know how many family members each of these women bead makers supports, (the multiplier effect can be as high as five people dependent on that one income in that specific household), but in ordering your bracelets, Proudly SA contributed to giving a woman and her family an income.

The bracelets are also ready for collection from the GCIS Parliamentary office.

Imagine then if each of you – the

almost 500 members of the National Assembly and NCOP combined – were to wear an entire outfit, top to bottom, from necktie to shoes, hair to heels, that was designed and manufactured here in South Africa by local workers, how many jobs that would represent and what the rand value would be.

The collective effort of our parliamentarians alone, just for that day in the joint sitting, could boost any number of small businesses and entrepreneurs, provide much needed jobs and a salary to many.

You, our elected members of parliament, have to be the standard bearers of local procurement. Clothes are a very visible demonstration of support for the buy local movement and so we are asking here, (as well as on your Twitter pages), that you choose to wear an outfit on Thursday that was made here in SA.

Lead the way in increasing the tax base, sustaining jobs in the businesses that will benefit from your individual and collective efforts, and in the spirit of showing support for the wider creative industry in our country, "demonstrate" that you are truly committed to the country and its well-being, which is the title of the hit song, released by Paxton after she was a finalist on Idols.

Eustace Mashimbye is the chief executive of Proudly SA.