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Zondo commission – Makwetla tells Zondo he regrets Bosasa favour

Deputy minister of military veterans Thabang Makwetla says the first time he learned of a Special Investigating Unit report into catering company Bosasa was in 2019 at the end of his term as deputy minister of correctional services.

The report was made available to him in the lead up to the national elections, and he has to date not had a chance to read it in full. Makwetla appeared before the state capture commission on Friday to answer to allegations that he received free services to his private Johannesburg home from Bosasa in 2015.

Angelo Agrizzi, the former COO of Bosasa, which later traded as African Global Operations, named Makwetla among politicians for whom security equipment was installed by the company in return for their favours in the interest of the government contracts held by the company. He said Makwetla's home was secured for R650 000 at Bosasa's cost, in 2014. Makwetla however told the commission that this was inaccurate, as the only security equipment installed came in early 2015, on the insistence of Bosasa CEO, the late Gavin Watson.

Watson had asked to meet with Makwetla at the beginning of the year to talk about service pricing difficulties Bosasa was experiencing with its catering contract with the Department of Correctional Services (DCS). During the meeting, the two spoke of their respective festive season experiences, and it was at this point that Makwetla shared with Watson that his home had been burgled while his family was in Cape Town in December. Watson then offered to have his residence evaluated so as to advise on how it could be secured. According to Makwetla, he was not even aware at this point that Bosasa also provided home security services as they did for prisons.

Some time later Makwetla arrived at his home from his ministerial engagements in Cape Town to find a team deployed by Watson already installing security equipment. When he asked Watson later what the cost was, he was told not to worry, it was a favour.

"When he said that I was very anxious because I could see that they were doing other things that I did not understand," said Makwetla, referring to additional services by the team that he had not been apprised of. He told Watson he could not accept the favour because Bosasa rendered services to DCS.

Makwetla persisted, but with no success. "It went on and on continuously trying to put pressure on him to say bill me."

Based on Watson's relationship with former president Jacob Zuma, Makwetla sought to involve the latter, he said, in getting Watson to do the right thing, but got the cold shoulder. "I knew the

president would find it easy to take it up with him...I had no doubt that raised by the president with him, he would back up and understand.”

The animosity from Zuma did not surprise him as Makwetla took it to relate to the politics around the MK veterans structures within the ANC.

When President Cyril Ramaphosa took over the leadership of the ANC in December 2017, Makwetla tried to meet with him, but it would take another year before the two could talk. By then the matter of the security equipment was in the media, with Makwetla having declared the service before Parliament. At this point Watson tried to make amends by apologising to Makwetla, but the latter felt the apology should be taken to Parliament’s Ethics Committee, which would by now be aware of the implications for the deputy minister for not having declared the service as a gift.

Although Makwetla made a payment of R25 000 towards the service, he was found guilty by the joint committee on ethics and members’ interests, the process of which he disputes.

“It is something that I find most regrettable... I never even suspected that Gavin would do what he did. I must say that it is a lesson that you never know what you are dealing with and I’m saying this because there are the disclosures that we now know,” said Makwetla when asked about his position on the matter.

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