



Parliament of Sint Maarten

Staten van Sint Maarten

To the Hon. Minister of Finance
Mr. M. Ferrier
p/a Council of Ministers
Philipsburg

UV/178/2017-2018

Philipsburg, April 24, 2018

Re: Questions from MP R. Brison regarding budget 2018

Hon. Minister Ferrier,

Herewith I submit to you questions posed by Member of Parliament, Mr. R. Brison pursuant to article 62 of the Constitution and article 69 of the Rules of Order of the Parliament of Sint Maarten.

The letter is self-explanatory.

Yours truly,



S. A. Wescot-Williams
President of Parliament

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To the President of Parliament
The Hon. Sarah Wescott-Williams
Parliament Building
Philipsburg,

Monday, April 23, 2018

Re: Serious concerns Budget 2018

Dear Madame President,

Over the past few days, I have received first the Memo from the Minister of Finance regarding the proposed schedule for budget 2018: 10/apr/2018 IS/454, the convocation to meetings this Wednesday (CC 23) regarding various crucial topics (Recovery, Waste Management and the Cyber Attacks), followed by the Central Committee meeting regarding the Budget 2018 (CC24).

Madame President, I am deeply disturbed by several issues related to the above. While I am aware that the Central Committee is Thursday and it affords me the opportunity to raise these concerns in that meeting, I feel it would be irresponsible of me to let more time pass without having these urgent items addressed before any such meeting take place.

Evaluation time of the various entities in the budgetary process

First of all, the schedule presented by the Minister of Finance has made it so that the various bodies that must review this budget have had very limited time to review. For example, in the Memo IS/454, the Minister has only allowed for 1 full business day for the council of advice to render advice on the budget. As you know, the Council had advised us recently that they try to get the most urgent requests completed within 2 weeks.

Preparation Time of Parliament

Additionally, based on the schedule, and now on the convocation for meetings, we see that the first meeting regarding the budget is scheduled for Thursday April 26th, with the budget needing to be approved on Monday May 1st, just 5 days of deliberations even if we work through the weekend and holidays (something I have no issue doing in the interest of the country). But this is after giving us just 3 days ahead of the CC24 meeting to prepare for said meeting. On top of that we have to debate 3 crucial topics Wednesday and we have to prepare for that too; these are topics absolutely crucial to the country at this stage, so I am against any further postponement of that meeting: I have no issue with high workload at all, but we want to give quality work as well to the people of St. Maarten.

I'm sure you are aware that the budget is 191 pages long, is the first budget in the history of St. Maarten to have a deficit, and you may also share my opinion that this may be one of the most crucial budgets approved by our country, paramount to the recovery of this island. To have this budget schedule proceed as suggested by the Minister of Finance with the lack of preparation time would be paramount to making Parliament a "Rubber Stamp".

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What is also unclear is the "promised deadline" of May 1st that the Minister of Finance spoke of. We need clarity on this date and why it has come to this.

Budget Format far from ideal

The budget submitted in PDF form digitally is far from ideal. It is a poorly scanned document, with most of the headings illegible, and the printed version is even worse, with most of the document having many illegible headings and figures.

It is a scanned document, rather than a fully digital document. The latter format would allow us to better search through the document, confirm the formula's to check for mathematical errors or inconsistencies, and very importantly, confirm that all sub-items under the heading of the budget have been included. I know that there is a working Excel document that many civil servants have access to, I think it only practical to ensure parliament has this at our disposal as well, which with just a few mouse-clicks can be made into a Read-Only documents and sent to all members of Parliament.

As is the concern during every debate in the past: The entire budget is in Dutch. My concern is not for our faction necessarily, but more so for other MP's who are not fluent in Dutch as I am, and most importantly, the public that would like to review the document in English.

In addition, the explanatory notes are in PDF but scanned. Better to send us the original PDF which is also searchable and legible.

Questions and Requests

With the above taken into consideration Madame President, I kindly ask the following:

Regarding the review process:

- Can we ascertain the actual time the advisory bodies, council of ministers, governor and others have had to review this budget, and ensure that they feel they have had sufficient time to review this budget before president to Parliament, unaffected by the undue pressure of an unrealistic schedule hanging over them?

Regarding the deadline of May 1st:

- Why this deadline?
- Who imposed this or came up with this deadline?
- What is the authority of this entity to impose deadline on Parliament, the representatives of the people who have the constitutional mandate to approve this budget?
- Does the Minister of Finance, using the pressure of time through his proposed schedule, expect Parliament to merely "rubber stamp" this budget without any real deliberation, scrutiny and preparation?

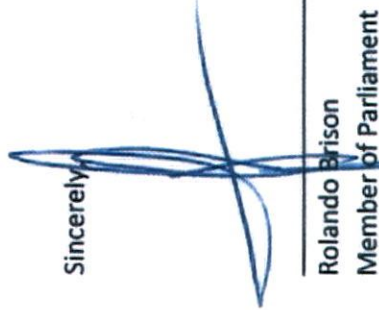
Regarding the document submitted as budget 2018:

- Kindly seek your assistance in having the Minister of Finance send a fully digital version of the Budget (Excel) and the explanatory notes (Word or PDF) to allow us to better evaluate the items within the budget, search through the document ("CTRL-F"), as well as confirm at least the rudimentary mathematical accuracies and calculations of said budget.
- When will parliament and the public be provided with the English version of the document?

Madame President, our faction, and all my fellow MP's, have taken the oath to uphold the constitution. As we know, Article 100 and other articles of our constitution are very clear about the mandate and responsibility of Parliament in deliberating, approving, and amending the budget. Through this letter I ask you to help us have what is necessary to uphold this constitutional right as sacred, especially with a budget that has the future of St. Maarten and the recovery of this country in its peripheral.

I thank you very much for your urgent attention in this matter, as the proposed meeting is just days away.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Rolando Brison', written over a horizontal line.

Rolando Brison
Member of Parliament