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MINISTER READY TO PLACE NHI BILL BEFORE CABINET

The long-awaited National Health Insurance (NHI) Bill was ready for President Cyril Ramaphosa's scrutiny, Health Minister Aaron Motsoaledi said on Tuesday.

Motsoaledi sought to assure Parliament he was making progress in realising the ANC's promise of universal healthcare.

Delivering his budget speech to Parliament, Motsoaledi said he had planned to present the bill and a related Medical Schemes Amendment Bill to a cabinet committee on Tuesday morning, in the expectation that they would be recommended for approval next week.

"However, the president said he has taken a special personal interest in the NHI and hence instructed that we put the bill in abeyance and not present it in his absence [as he is out of the country]. So I have presented the Medical Schemes Amendment Bill to the committee.

"The two bills will be released together as soon as the NHI Bill has been dealt with, with the president leading from the front," said Motsoaledi.

Ramaphosa is attending an International Labour Organisation meeting in Geneva.

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The ANC resolved to implement NHI before Motsoaledi became health minister in 2009. Progress has been slow, with the publication of several iterations of an ambitious policy critics have described as long on aspiration but short on detail.

In the interim, no significant reforms to the health system have yet been implemented.

At its heart, NHI is a set of health-financing reforms that aim to provide everyone with healthcare services that are free at the point of delivery.

It is enshrined in the social solidarity principle that everyone should contribute according to their ability, and will receive benefits according to their needs, in effect ensuring the rich and healthy subsidise the poor and sick.

A key provision of the bill will be the establishment of an NHI fund for health services.

Motsoaledi also indicated that he expected industry opposition to the state's new proposals for tobacco control, spelt out in the Tobacco Products and Electronic Delivery Systems Bill, published for comment last week.

He urged MPs not to let themselves be manipulated by tobacco companies lobbying for a softer stance.

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EYEWITNESS NEWS 14 MAY 2018

The Health Minister says he's ready to place the NHI Bill before Cabinet for approval and subsequent public comment but has held off on the request of President Cyril Ramaphosa.

CAPE TOWN - Health Minister Aaron Motsoaledi says critics of government's National Health Insurance (NHI) who believe the scheme won't see the light of day must think again.

Delivering his budget vote in Parliament on Tuesday evening, Motsoaledi says while there are those who are justifiably impatient for the bill to be implemented, there are also those who, for reasons of greed, don't want it to come into being.

Motsoaledi says he's ready to place the NHI Bill before Cabinet for approval and subsequent public comment but has held off on the request of President Cyril Ramaphosa, who is currently out of the country.

"The president said he has taken a special, personal interest in NHI and hence he instructed us to put the bill in abeyance."