

'Relax, NHI will not happen': Sunday Independent, 18 August 2019

"JUST relax, NHI is not going to happen." Those were the words by economist Dawie Roodt this week as South Africans went into panic mode following the tabling of the National Health Insurance (NHI) Bill in Parliament. Twenty-five years since the idea was first mooted, the government announced that the NHI, its new health funding mechanism, would come into effect in 2026. This is to equalise access to health care for all South Africans and do away with medical aid in its current form. Under the new model, current public health patients could end up in private hospitals and private health patients in public health facilities. The news saw many health professionals weighing up their options between staying at home or moving abroad, while unions welcomed what they called a pro-poor policy. However, Roodt said that to implement the NHI the government would need plenty of money which would place a bigger burden on its already strained coffers. He said the NHI will not happen because this government just cannot organise anything. They are just not going to get things right in time. Roodt said the government needed to cut state spending by 15 percent or R200-billion to stabilise its current debt. Therefore, said Roodt, the billions needed to fund the NHI did not exist and no country or institution would lend South Africa that amount of money. He said even without Eskom, the debt levels of national government will exceed 60 percent of the GDP. Roodt said the NHI would only come into existence if the government expected the private medical industry to pay for NHI. He said the NHI was forcing doctors to work for the government and patients to go to doctors chosen for them. He said if you force everyone into one camp and tell them to work for the NHI a lot of doctors are going to say "goodbye". Roodt said it is complete madness and it is going to run into a brick wall somewhere. He said if the NHI was implemented it would fail and the government would blame it on the "capitalists and doctors who ran away". He said a few "sane" people probably kicked the NHI "can" further down the road, but he suspected that President Cyril Ramaphosa used it as a bargaining chip. Heinrich Volmink, executive director of Organisation Undoing Tax Abuse (Outa), said they believed in the need for universal healthcare and equality of care for everyone but were concerned by the bill in its current form, because the government wanted to build a colossal system on the back of one that was already broken. Volmink said Outa would meet with several experts in a range of fields and then give South Africans a chance to share their views in a public participation process. He said Parliament will need the public behind it to ensure success, adding that while social justice and equity in healthcare was essential, everyone needed healthcare that did not put them in financial risk.