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Zondo commission – Zondo told of Agrizzi’s lies to discredit business associate Wakeford

Businessman and former Armscor CEO Kevin Wakeford has denied all allegations made against him by former Bosasa COO Angelo Agrizzi and associate Frans Vorster, to the state capture commission. In his early 2019 testimony, Agrizzi positioned Wakeford as a conduit between both the Department of Home Affairs and later Sars, among other government institutions with which Bosasa had dealings.

Wakeford told the commission on Thursday that it was Agrizzi’s disdain for him as an individual that led to the latter trying to discredit him publicly by spewing lies in a public platform like the commission. Wakeford conceded that he was employed as a turnaround advisor for then home affairs minister Nosiviwe Mapisa-Nqakula between 2006 and 2009, while also on a retainer for Bosasa as a consultant. Agrizzi said because Wakeford brought in consultant Aneel Rahadkrishna to the picture to help negotiate an extension for a contract for the upkeep of Lindela Repatriation Centre in Krugersdorp, both were compensated with cash when the extension was indeed awarded.

Evidence leader Advocate Viwe Notshe asked Wakeford if the situation was not “uncomfortable” for him, and if he was not conflicted. “The period of my involvement at Home Affairs was of short duration in comparison to the period I had been with the Bosasa Group, albeit that it was a small portion of my total time ... there was nothing untoward about it at all and understand that turnaround was such a big project – 55 projects, seven work streams,” he answered.

He denied that owing to his influence in the negotiations, Bosasa made noticeable profit in the Lindela contract. For the figures presented by Agrizzi to be believed, Wakeford said they would have to be analysed by a specialist, as he did not trust their authenticity.

Wakeford said his takeaway from the negotiations with the department was that it made savings in some areas of the work involved in Lindela amounting to around R600 000 a month.

Agrizzi further alleged that Wakeford influenced the process of a Sars investigation into Bosasa, allegedly by influencing an official of the tax revenue service, George Papadakis, who would later be compensated by Bosasa with R600 000 worth of cement for renovations around his home. Wakeford again denied this, saying that Papadakis ran into a problem while in the middle of renovations, and this was during the large-scale building projects leading up to the 2010 World Cup, where cement producers and suppliers were stocked out. He called in a favour with Ronnie Watson, a brother of Bosasa CEO Gavin Watson, who had connections in the sector, to help resolve the challenge.

Papadakis got his cement, and the company that supplied it invoiced Bosasa for the payment.

Notshe said while there was proof of the invoice of the supplier, there was not the same to show that Papadakis paid Bosasa back for it. Wakeford said the commission would have to pursue this directly with Papadakis, as he only had second-hand information that Bosasa was repaid by him.

Earlier in the day, however, Notshe had submitted that like Wakeford, Papadakis had been given notice of his implication by Agrizzi, but told the commission that he was prohibited by the Tax Administration Act from giving evidence on his affairs with Bosasa.

“Papadakis could not receive cement in 2009 as compensation for influencing a major Sars investigation as no Sars investigation occurred over this period. The first audit conducted only commenced two years later in 2011,” Wakeford said.

Wakeford said Agrizzi’s allegation does not hold water as the investigation and the cement matter occurred at separate times, and thus could not be linked.

"I unequivocally deny these allegations made by these witnesses seeking to implicate me in corruption and fraud in relation to Bosasa and the Department of Home Affairs, Sars, or any other organ of state."

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