



As the 2020 Budget Speech draws closer, tax pundits have dusted off their crystal balls and weighed in on what the Minister of Finance may announce. Much of the pre-budget hype focuses on whether tax rates will be hiked or on the likelihood of new taxes being introduced. Given the widening gap between government expenditure and revenue collections, both are powerful tools at the minister's arsenal. However, an important and often overlooked aspect of balancing the country's books is the efficient collection of all taxes that are due and payable. Equally important, is ensuring that taxpayers are held liable only for tax that is due by them and is not subject to meritless additional assessments, delays in obtaining refunds and an all too common disregard for administrative compliance and procedural fairness by SARS.



The Office of the Tax Ombud plays a critical role in assisting taxpayers in resolving administrative and procedural complaints against SARS. Also, the Ombud has been of great assistance to taxpayers in highlighting and bringing some resolution to systemic issues within SARS. To ensure that the Office of the Tax Ombud can continue with its work, free of any influence from SARS, the Ombud is leading a drive for structural and legal independence from SARS. Related to the question of independence is the question of whether the Ombud's decisions should be binding on SARS.

We support the Ombud in its quest for independence as well as the strengthening of its powers to hold SARS to account. The announcement of changes to the Tax Administration Act or even the introduction of a stand-alone Act to empower and govern the Office of Tax Ombud would, therefore, be high on our wish list for the 2020 budget speech.

