

PRESS CONFERENCE BY THE MINORITY IN PARLIAMENT

15th January 2025

Dear Friends in the Media,

Three days ago, in accordance with the constitutional requirement outlined in Article 78 (1), the Appointments Committee of Parliament met to consider the vetting of three ministerial nominees for the positions of Finance Minister Designate, Energy Minister Designate, and Minister of Justice and Attorney General Designate. By the practice of the House, these nominees could have waited for about three weeks to enable the committee to obtain comments from the public. However, in the interest of national development, we waived that privilege to allow the process to proceed. We cooperated with the majority side for a smooth process.

However, there are a few observations we made during the process that we feel obliged to share with the general public.

General Overview of the Vetting and the Chairman's Posturing

1. The notice of the nominations was received by the Speaker on January 9, 2024, and was subsequently referred to the Appointments Committee. Acting in good faith, the minority fully committed to the process. This commitment stemmed from our desire to ensure that President John Dramani Mahama had the

opportunity to shape his government without delay. Nonetheless, we expected that the members and friends of the committee would be given sufficient questioning time to examine every matter in detail. Unfortunately, this was not the case.

2. Members of the Committee were not provided with the CVs of the nominees ahead of the vetting. When they were eventually served with the CVs during the vetting, the Chairman, did not allow for the examination of those CVs as preliminary issues, as had been the practice in the past. The deliberate refusal to provide the CVs of the nominees to committee members in advance, and the refusal to invite questions on the CVs as preliminary matters, were all calculated attempts to obstruct constructive and effective scrutiny of the nominees.

3. Ladies and gentlemen, the Chairman of the Appointments Committee was the first real obstacle to a diligent vetting of the ministerial nominees. He denied the Ghanaian people and the minority members of the committee the opportunity to conduct a thorough vetting of the nominees. He was protective of the nominees and extremely partisan.

4. Members of the committee were shouted at by the Chairman. You all witnessed how the Member for Atiwa East, Hon. Abena Osei-Asare, was shouted at in an attempt to protect the nominees. The Chairman denied legitimate members of the committee the opportunity to ask relevant questions and railroaded the nominees through the process.

5. It must be noted that the altercation between our side of the committee and the Chairman was a direct protest against his conduct. Under the façade of a lack of capacity, he disregarded the fact that those he bullied were members of Parliament, and that the committee is a sub-body of the House. It cannot be right that members who are tasked by the Ghanaian people with oversight are denied the opportunity to scrutinize the nominees.

5. The Chairman and the majority members of the Appointments Committee owe it to Ghana to assist us in fulfilling the work entrusted to us by the Constitution. If this is not changed moving forward, we fear that a irreparable harm will be done to our democracy, with round pegs occupying square holes.

With these general observations, we shall now examine the specific issues with the respective nominees when they appeared before the Appointments Committee.

Finance Minister Designate

6. Hon. Cassiel Ato Baah Forson, who appeared as the finance minister Designate, was evasive, inconsistent, and lacked clarity of thought. Having served as a Deputy Minister of Finance and a ranking member of the Finance Committee, one would have expected his answers to be forthright and to exude concrete solutions.

7. For instance, on the specific matter of whether the government would cater for the first-year tuition fees of tertiary students as

promised, we found the Minister designate's response highly disappointing. How can a finance minister designate look into the faces of parents and young Ghanaian students and say that because he is not yet the Minister, he cannot answer whether the pledge by President Mahama to pay for their fees would be honored? This is a clear way of telling our tertiary students that the NDC party deceived them into voting for them.

8. When asked about the Free SHS program and whether it would be extended to private schools as indicated in the NDC manifesto, the Minister Designate, in a very dismissive manner, asked whether those private schools write WASSCE exams. First, it was shocking to observe the minister designate feign ignorance of the fact that there are many private SHS that write the WASSCE. We can all recall that during the election campaign, President Mahama met the leadership of the private senior high schools and promised to include private schools in the free SHS programme.

If President Mahama and the NDC knew that no private SHS writes WASSCE exams, why did they promise to include them in the Free SHS program? For the information of the Minister and President Mahama, there are private SHS in Ghana that write WASSCE, and they are anxiously waiting to be included in the Free SHS program.

- What is the finance minister designate waiting for?
- Was this not their campaign promise?
- What informed the promises?
- Didn't they do the numbers first?

- In the case of the Free SHS, is the Minister Designate saying that only those schools writing WASSCE are qualified for the Free programme?

9. The number of students in our tertiary schools is a public record, and an estimate ought to have been known with the promise. On behalf of our sons, daughters, nephews, and nieces, we wish to remind the government that these students will be entering tertiary institutions any moment now. Particularly for KNUST, the deadline for payment of fees for freshers was just yesterday. The students are waiting.

10. We acknowledge the Minister designate's definitive commitment to scrap the betting tax, e-levy, COVID levy, and emissions tax. While this act is commendable, it raises concerns that the Minister failed to address.

11. First, we would like to know how the Minister Designate plans to make up for the revenue shortfalls that will arise as a result of the tax cuts. The Minister's quick response was cuts in expenditure. While we believe expenditure cuts could be a possible way to match revenue with expenses in order not to run into fiscal deficits, it is not, in itself, the ultimate solution to address revenue shortfalls.

11. On the matter of expenditure cuts, the Minister Designate fell short in providing clarity on which aspects of government expenditure he intends to cut. Is it salaries, interest payments, or

capital expenditure? Would the Minister Designate's expenditure cuts affect:

- Teacher trainee allowances
- Nursing trainee allowances
- Free SHS
- Livelihood empowerment against poverty
- Subsidy on fertilizers for farmers
- School feeding program
- Salaries of government workers
- Improvement in the conditions of service for teachers, health professionals, security officers, and all essential service providers
- Infrastructure in the roads sector, education sector, health sector, and agriculture sector
- Ongoing road construction projects
- Youth employment
- Social safety net programmes?

Ghanaians need to know.

12. The Minister Designate's unconvincing responses regarding how he intends to make up for the revenue shortfalls leave us with no choice but to think that he will scrap these taxes but introduce new ones, perhaps more draconian than those he would scrap. He cannot give with his right hand and take back with his left hand.

13. The integrity of the finance minister designate was again called into question when he provided incorrect data in response to a question about some misleading data he had used in 2019. The

Minister Designate clearly sought refuge in IMF data, which turned out to be different from what he presented. When he realized that his own source could not substantiate his case, he claimed he was being charitable by providing a lower figure for the fiscal deficit of 6.1% for 2016, while the IMF's figure was 6.3%. Can a Minister boldly claim he was charitable in presenting incorrect figures? Interesting.

Energy Minister Designate

The case of the Energy Minister Designate was not different.

14. Firstly, when questioned about his previous criticism of the Gold for Oil policy, which he labeled a "scam," the nominee remained steadfast in his stance, showing no remorse. He stated that he would review the policy, but we must ask: how does one review a scam? His lack of accountability is troubling, especially as he failed to provide any viable solutions to the persistent issue of access to foreign exchange for petroleum imports, a matter that directly impacts fuel pricing. We face a significant increase in petroleum prices, ultimately burdening the public with higher costs.

15. Secondly, regarding fuel supply for power generation, the nominee previously alarmed the nation by claiming that the previous government left us with only five hours of fuel. He stated, "I have bad news for you; just today, the confirmation we are getting is that we have only 5 hours of fuel stock. If you look at heavy fuel oil and distillate fuel, we don't have up to 2 days. In two days', time, we are likely to run out of fuel. This administration has

not ordered any fuel as we speak. It takes on average, 4 weeks for the fuel to arrive and 4 weeks for the fuel to be treated. We are in a very serious situation."

16. However, when pressed for clarification, he shifted his narrative, specifying that he was referring only to Heavy Fuel Oil (HFO) for AKSA and light crude oil for Sunon Asogli. This is misleading, as it disregards the fact that CenPower had sufficient light crude oil reserves to last for 23 days, and that the procurement of fuel for Independent Power Producers (IPPs) is an ongoing process. Such inconsistencies only serve to sow confusion and panic within the business community and the public. The question we ask is: it has been more than 2 days; why is the light not off?

17. Lastly, the nominee's position on private sector participation in the Electricity Company of Ghana (ECG) has also shifted dramatically. On September 18, 2024, he suggested that private sector involvement was detrimental to ECG, citing the need to reduce political interference. Yet, by January 7, 2025, he had reversed his stance, advocating for private sector participation in metering and collection.

18. He claims to have remained consistent, but the evidence suggests otherwise. Does the nominee want to introduce 'GORO BOYS' into ECG activities? We urge the public to reflect deeply on the implications of these responses. The role of the Minister of Energy is pivotal for our nation's future, and we must demand

accountability, transparency, and a commitment to the welfare of all citizens. Let us not overlook the substance of these answers as we consider the path forward for our energy sector.

Attorney General and Minister of Justice Designate

19. In the case of Dr. Dominic Ayine, it is clear he finds himself in a conflict-of-interest position. His law firm and he personally are representing companies that have filed arbitration claims in excess of 500 million US dollars. Can Ghanaians go to sleep believing that their money will be safe and that it will not be stolen through the payment of dubious judgment debts, as we saw in the Wayome case?

20. Ladies and gentlemen of the media, watch the space for GPGC and Cassius Mining arbitration claims against the Government of Ghana. In any serious country, we believe the Attorney General Designate would not have accepted the appointment.

21. Mr. Attorney General Designate, why the Public Tribunal? What is our High Court not doing right, necessitating the creation of the Public Tribunal? In the last 8 years, through the District Assembly Common Fund, 110 new courts have been created. If it's about more courts, like the NPP, the NDC should build more. In any event, the Chief Justice has the power to create more specialized courts, including specialized criminal high courts. There is, therefore, no need for the Public Tribunal, which is associated with killing our mothers and fathers.