
Liberia: 'Deficit Imminent in National Budget'

By J. Burgess Carter

Grand Bassa County Senator Nyonblee Karnga-Lawrence has warned of an imminent deficit in the National Budget in the wake of what she called, 'serious economic' set back the country is at present experiencing.

In a letter sent to Senate plenary dated January 13, Senator Lawrence blamed the closure or downsizing of operations by some concessions, including ArcelorMittal and Putu mining companies, for the difficulties and delay in disbursement of budgetary allotments to ministries and agencies, as well as the Social and County Development Funds which, she said, have been held up for months. According to her, these are some of the reasons for concerns or fear of an imminent deficit of the National Budget.

ArcelorMittal has already announced that it has decided to put down 167 workers which is less than the over 200 earlier earmarked for redundancy, while the closure of Putu Iron Ore Mining has affected 98 percent of its workforce, with reports that its manager is holed up in a cubicle at a local hotel in Monrovia.

The matter, she said, is even compounded by the rapid increase in the exchange rate between the United States Dollar and the Liberian Dollar.

"Because of the above challenges, we can safely say the deficit in the National Budget is imminent, the lives of many Liberians are affected and the operations of many businesses and the developmental agenda of the country could also be affected," she said.

The Grand Bassa lawmaker continued: "My distinguished colleagues, as we start the 5th Session of the 53rd Legislature, it is my pleasing duty to recommend that we commence with a special hearing session with the Ministry of Finance, the National Investment Commission, and the Liberia Revenue Authority, to do an assessment of the Liberian economy."

The hearings, according to Senator Lawrence, will include but not be limited to: knowing the status of major concessions' operations; a look at the stability of the revenue envelop; and getting a report from the Finance Ministry on the entire operations of the 2015-2016 National Budget up date, as required by the Budget Law.

"The hearing will provide an opportunity for the Senate to identify the economic challenges and exert oversight responsibilities accordingly," she said.

Meanwhile, because of the importance the Senators attached to the letter, it was unanimously voted that the 4th day sitting of the Senate next Thursday be exclusively allotted for debating the issues raised.

Meanwhile, in a brief reflection of her constituency break, the Grand Bassa County lawmaker has disclosed that she spent well over two months in the United States on behalf of the Nyonblee Lawrence Foundation, working with several international foundations especially in the health sector.

In that effort, she said, she was able to acquire 700 brand new hospital beds for the country, over 1000 boxes of medical supplies. "We loaded eight containers with the help of Bong County Senator Henry Yallah and Rep. William Dakeh; presently, there are five containers at the Freeport of Monrovia and we're working with the Ministry of Health to get the containers out of the port."

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