

Institute for Research and Democratic Development (IREDD)

Full Monitoring Report

Theme:

“Promises Fulfilled”

1st Session of the 54th Legislature

January – September 15, 2018

Summary

The Institute for Research and Democratic Development (IREDD) is pleased to share with the Public its full monitoring report of the 1st session of the 54th Legislature. This report covers monitoring outcomes from January 15 to September 14, 2018.

Similar to our past reports, this report focuses on the Lawmaking, Representation and Oversight functions of legislators; however, particular emphasis is placed on performance of lawmakers in relations to their political parties and the county they represent.

The following are the main findings documented:

LAWMAKING

IREDD research recorded 15 bills passed by the House of Representatives during the period under-review. Of that number, the Senate concurred with the lower House on ten (10) although the President vetoed one of the bills; the Mineral Development Agreement between the Government of Liberia and Humingburg Resources-Liberia Inc. Essentially, nine bills emanating from the House of Representatives were passed into law during the period.

At the Senate, IREDD recorded twenty two (22) bills, twenty (20) of those bills are pending concurrence at the House of Representatives. It pleases IREDD to note that two of the bills she has long advocated for (Local Government Act and Land Rights Act) which originated in the Senate were finally passed by the Legislature and signed into law by the President on September 19, 2018.

PARTICIPATION

In the House of Representatives, a total of 849 participation times¹ were recorded over the period. Of those participation times, the opposition Unity Party (UP) performed highest with cumulative participation of 282 participation times followed by the ruling Coalition for Democratic Change (CDC) came second with 213 participation times; they are followed by the People Unification Party (PUP) with a total of 164 participation times. Others are Independents (86); LINU (20); ALP (16); MDR (16); MOVEE (14); LP (13); VCP (11); LTP (9); MPC (5) participation times accordingly.

¹ Participation time denotes the number of times a lawmaker speaks in a plenary sitting.

At the Senate, a total of 1146 participation times were recorded during the period. The UP attained 509 participation times while the Liberty Party came second with 125 participation times. The ruling CDC attained 103 participation times; the National Patriotic Party (102); NDC (100); IND (65); NUDP (40); ANC (33); APD (30); PUP (23); and MDR (16) participation times cumulatively.

It is important to note that participation time as defined by IREDD does not measure the quality of the debate, just the number of times a representative spoke on the floor of plenary.

ATTENDANCE

IREDD's record of attendance encapsulates averages of whether a lawmaker was recorded "present, absent, distant, excused, or sick" during the plenary period.

House of Representatives

A total amount of three thousand five hundred and sixty eight (3,568) present times was recorded by IREDD for the period. The ruling CDC topped with 898 present times followed by the UP with 835 present times. Others recorded were IND (535); PUP (206); LP (152); ALP (131); MDR (76); LINU (53); LTP (52); VCP (47); MOVEE (45); MPC (39) present times cumulatively.

Total "absences" for the period was 838. Of this figure, CDC lawmakers topped the absent times with 219 times cumulatively. The UP absences amounted to 144 times; the PUP (199); Independents (160); LP (53); ALP (22); MPC (13); MOVEE (10); VCP (5); LINU (3); and the LTP (2) absence times cumulatively.

For the category of "distant" which accounts for lawmaker's not in session or attending plenary but are out on official duty either abroad or in his or her district, the total recorded figure is 272 "distant times."

The "excuse" category which denotes absences based on letter written by a lawmaker seeking excuse from plenary for other reasons was 30. In the "sick" category which is official excuse due to illness, the total "sick" times recorded was 28. Of this number, Representative Munah Pelham Youngblood of the CDC accounted of 26.

IREDD observed that on average, for every three times a representative attended session, he or she was away from session one time.

Comparing the attendance record of the representatives of three parties, the CDC scored 4 As, 6 Bs, 6 Cs, 4 Ds and 2 Fs. The UP obtained 7 As, 6 Bs, 3 Cs, 1 D, and 3 Fs. The LP obtained no A, no B, 3 Cs, and 1 D.

A record of attendance between 90-100% equals "A"; 80-89% equals "B"; 70-79% equals "C"; 60-69% equals "D"; any average below equals an "F" grade.

House of Senate

A total number of eight hundred and seventeen (817) present times was recorded by IREDD for the period. The UP topped with 321 present times followed by the LP with 88 present times. Others recorded were CDC (70); NPP (64); NDC (63); Independents (40); NUDP (35); PUP (29); APD (29); LDP (29); and, ANC (25) present times cumulatively.

Total “absences” for the period was 122. Of this figure, UP lawmakers were absent the most times (29). The NDC absences amounted to 15 times; LP (14); CDC (8); NPP (10); MDR (10); PUP (8); ANC (7); APD (7); LDP (7); NUDP (3); and, Independents (2) absence times cumulatively.

For the category of “distant” the total recorded number is 103 “distant times.” There were 7 in the “excuse” category and in the “sick” category; the total “sick times” recorded was 43. Of this number, Senator Geraldine Doe Sheriff accounted for 28.

As with the House of Senate, IREDD observed that on average, for every three times a Senator attended session, he or she was away from session one time.

Comparing the attendance record of Senators of three parties, the CDC scored no A, with only 2 Bs. The UP obtained 3 As, 3 Bs, 2 Cs, 1 D, and 1 F. The LP obtained no A, no B, 1 C, and 2 Ds.

County Performance Comparison

Attendance

In terms of county presence at plenary session, Nimba County scored the highest with an average attendance score of 88% while Bomi County ranked least at 45.2%. In between these scores, Margibi ranked second with an average attendance of 87.4%, followed by Rivergee in third with an average of 86.2%. Others are: Maryland (82.6%); Gbarpolu (81.9%); Bong (81.5%); (Grand Kru (81.5%); Lofa (80.9%); Sinoe (78.3%); Grand Cape Mount (77.5%); Montserrado (76.2%); Rivercess (76.1%); Grand Gedeh (70.3%); and, Grand Bassa (67%).

Highlighting the highest and lowest performing counties, for Nimba, which has nine representatives in the House, one representative scored an “A” grades with the other eight each getting “B” grades. For the least performing Bomi County, two of the three representatives scored “Fs” and the third obtained a grade of “C”.

In the Senate, Grand Gedeh County scored the highest with an average attendance score of 89.2% while Montserrado County ranked least at 28.57%. In between these scores, Rivercess ranked second with an average attendance of 83.3%, followed by Maryland and Grand Kru in third with an average of 82.1%. Others are: Rivergee (79.7%); Lofa (79.7%); Bomi (77.3%); Sinoe (77.3%); Margibi (76.2%); Grand Cape Mount (77.5%); Grand Bassa (71.4%); Nimba (70.2%) and Bong (52.4%);

Highlighting the highest and lowest performing counties in the Senate; Grand Gedeh County which ranked highest scored an “A” and a “B” grade. For the least performing Montserrado

County, Senator Geraldine Doe Sheriff, the lone Senator for much of the legislative sitting, scored an “F” which was largely due to her illness.

OVERSIGHT

On oversight, during the period under review, IREDD recorded 200 communications between both Houses of the Legislature. Of the 200 communications recorded, 120 or 60% came from the House of Representatives and 80 or 40% came from the Liberian Senate. There were one hundred eighty (180) Committee reports recorded at the House of Representatives and the Senate. Of the 180 committees reports, 100 or 55.6% came from the Liberian Senate and 80 or 44.5% came from the House of Representatives. Few of the reports related to a petition from citizens of Butaw, Sinoe County asking for the area to be made a statutory district; a letter requesting the Director General of the General Services Agency and the Minister of Public Works to provide detail clarification regarding the issue of the assets and properties of the Government of Liberia mobilized and deployed during the 1979 OAU Conference, and, a letter requesting plenary exercise its oversight mandate on the management of Farmington Hotel in Margibi County among others.

IREDD monitors are challenged by limited access to Committees’ works and meeting schedules. Minutes and bill tracking are often treated as a matter of privilege rather than a public right especially on the part of Lawmakers. Lack of access to Committee minutes as well as the new Legislature not-so-forthcoming commitment to bills tracking systems further complicates monitoring efforts and data collection. For legislative working, the long running problem of stationery and malfunctioning of office equipment such as copiers and printers within the secretariat pool of both Chambers of the Legislature and to a great extent, for offices of members of the House of Representatives remain. This also adversely affects information gathering for monitors. Despite the gaps, there is some level of willingness among staff to give public information. The Committee on Rules, Order and Administration needs to do more to improve on this stationery shortage.

Lawmaker’s Accountability to their Political Parties

Lawmakers elected under the umbrella of political parties have so far failed to be accountable to their respective political institutions. Some of these issues include:

1. Political parties’ caucuses at the Legislature remain weak and ineffective
2. Lawmakers rarely provide feedback to their respective political parties
3. There is little or no consultation with political institutions on whose popularity and platform many of those lawmakers won.
4. Four (4) lawmakers defected to the ruling CDC. Of these 2 were from the former ruling party (UP), 1 was from the Liberty Party (LP) and 1 from the Liberia Transformation Party. One UP lawmaker (Sen. Milton Teahjay) attended the defection ceremony stating that though still a UP lawmaker, his heart was with the CDC. All the defecting lawmakers are from the Southeastern region, the region of President Weah. This trend is

important to follow because if continued, signals are that the agenda of the CDC might get easy legislative approval then otherwise would have been were lawmakers to remain an opposition block.