

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Senate Standing Committee on Public Works, other distinguished Senators, former Senators here present, Family members, Friends, well-wishers, members of the press, distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen:

Today, we have come before your honorable Committee, in compliance with law, to seek your indulgence to be confirmed as Minister of Public Works, predicated on our preferment by His Excellency, President George Manneh Weah to serve in said capacity.

Permit me, therefore, to thank God Almighty, the author, and finisher of our faith, for his bountiful blessings bestowed upon my life, and for providing me, yet another opportunity, to serve my country and people.

It is with enormous pleasure and deep humility that I appear before your honorable distinguished Committee and its eminent membership on this momentous day, for these constitutionally significant ceremonies. And I do so in great obeisance to the Almighty God who has possibly destined this day. I also do so paying great homage and inordinate gratitude to the Chief Executive of the Republic, H. E. Ambassador, President George Manneh Weah, for his confidence reposed in me and for my preferment as the Public Works Minister Designate, to assist him carry out one of his most critically overriding development pillars (infrastructure).

Distinguished Senators, I hold a Bachelors of Science degree in Civil Engineering, an LLB in Law and a Masters degree in International Relations, with high honors. These qualifications, have adequately prepared me to productively contribute my quota to the development of our motherland.

In my professional life, I have worked as a civil engineer both in the public and private sectors. I have also had the unique opportunity to serve in senior managerial and administrative capacities at government agencies including the Liberia Water Seward Cooperation, and the Liberia Petroleum Refining Cooperation. I have also worked as a politician serving in the senate for nine consecutive years as the senior senator for the third original county of Liberia, Sinoe. Here at the senate distinguished senators, I served for the most part of my tenure as the chairman of the committee of public works, the committee on which you now sit and before which I am appearing, while at the senate I had the honor of representing the legislature to the ECOWAS parliament, where I served on the infrastructure committee of that body.

It is important to note, that my education and work experience are compelling factors supportive of my qualification and suitability to serve our country as the Minister of Public Works.

Distinguished Honorable Senators, indeed I am quite cognizant of the noble importance of the superseding role this government Ministry plays which underpins the stimulation and support for the much needed sustainable socio-economic growth and development for the overall benefit of the people of Liberia.

The Ministry of Public Works, as a statutory Agency of Government is primarily responsible to survey, plan, construct, draft/design all public infrastructures (highways, bridges, sea and air ports, rail and water ways, public buildings, etc.); and ensure compliance with acceptable engineering and architectural standards; register and issue certificates to construction companies and contractors operating in Liberia; and review, certify, issue permits, and administer rural and urban planning, zoning and land use activities: as well as establish the regulations for the development of these aforementioned infrastructure of our country.

Distinguished Senators, as I appear before you today, it must be noted that the infrastructural challenges of our Country are enormous, seemingly insurmountable, and therefore require the collectivity of our efforts to redress this alarming situation. Every County in our Country is bedeviled by infrastructural issues. Most of our roads, whether primary, secondary or feeder, are in a dire need of maintenance, rehabilitation or reconstruction in order to meet the ever-increasing needs of our population for unhindered movement of goods and services. In counties, there are many, many communities that are still inaccessible by roads.

The administration of President Weah is seized of this alarming situation and has therefore made infrastructural development the fulcrum of his Pro-Poor Agenda.

Distinguished Senators, another menace plaguing the Public infrastructural sector is the wanton disrespect for zoning regulations, urban planning restrictions and the outright disregard for acceptable engineering and architectural standards, more so, in the construction of buildings. Today, haphazard construction and erection of structures are becoming common placed in our cities, towns and communities.

When confirmed, our administration will institute a robust zero-tolerance attitude towards violators of zoning regulations and those engaged in construction activities without obtaining the requisite permits from the Ministry. We will demolish structures that are deliberately built in alleys, waterways contrary to zoning regulations and city planning. We will bring sanity to our communities by stubbornly ensuring proper layout of these communities and work to ensure conducive and improved road net-work, standard construction and standard city ordinance as required by global engineering and international best practices

Distinguished Senators, President Weah has made it abundantly clear that under his administration Liberians will not be mere spectators in the economy of their country. Consistent with this policy, when confirmed, we will give priority to Liberian construction contractors and dedicate resources to the building of their capacity so as to enable them fairly compete with other companies in the industry. We will also seek a renewed partnership with the Association of Liberian Construction Contractors as well as the Engineering Society of Liberia and the Chambers of Architects and Surveyors.

It is sad that while we are encouraging Liberian companies to get actively involved in the economy of our country, government agencies and ministries are heavily indebted to these companies for services performed. We want to assure construction contractors that while we demand of them excellent performance, we will, at the same time, ensure that they are paid for services properly rendered. We hold dear that the payment of contractors, based on allocated resources, is a condition precedent for the enhancement of our infrastructure development program.

Over time, the implementation of many infrastructure projects either funded by government or bilateral partners is delayed for various reasons, ranging from procurement bureaucracies, slow payment, to the lackadaisical attitude of contractors. It is also observed, that when such projects are said to be completed they are later realized to either be of poor quality, substandard, and not consistent with the original specification of the project. In such cases, the government will have to commit additional resources to redo such projects. This is tantamount to waste of the already scarce resources. Our administration, when confirmed will also adopt a zero tolerance towards delays in project implementation, and substandard works. Contractors found to be wanting will be severely penalized. Towards this end, we will immediately redeploy all of the county resident engineers to their respective counties of assignment.

Additionally, we will institute a technical review of all public infrastructural projects that are being implemented or signed, and yet to commence. The object of this exercise is to ensure that these projects are technically viable, and worthy of the cost for which they are being implemented. This exercise will also help us to identify those projects that have long passed their completion dates, and the contractors that are not in compliance with the terms and conditions of said contracts.

Our decision to institute this technical review is inform by the frequent reports of completed projects later found to be substandard, as well as, claims of contractors receiving funding and failing to implement projects as scheduled.

Distinguished Senators, when confirmed, we will seek the welfare of all workers at the Ministry of Public Works and create an enabling environment to reap maximum productivity. We will place a special premium on Engineers, architects and surveyors at the Ministry; and If need be, the Ministry of Public Works shall be the Ministry of Engineers, for engineers and by engineers with support from auxiliary employees.

Distinguished Senators, the infrastructure challenges of our country are multitudinous. Immediately upon our confirmation, we will categorize these challenges and develop the appropriate responses based on immediate, medium and long term achievable programs. Such plan of action will be submitted to you for appropriate budgetary support.

As we are aware, the Government has committed itself to the connection of all county capital cities by paved roads, the rehabilitation and maintenance of other roads and the construction of

new roads in communities that are still inaccessible. The realization of this commitment shall be the hallmark of our administration at the ministry of Public works and will certainly be achieved, with your support.

When confirmed by your honorable committee, we shall endeavor and collaborate with other Government Agencies, particularly the Honorable Legislative and Executive Branches to source funding from GOL and international development partners to ensure that the following road infrastructure priorities of government become a living reality:

- i. The Buchannan to Greenville-320km road,
- ii. The Greenville to Barclayville-124km road
- iii. Barclayville to Plebo-163km road
- iv. Zwedru to Greenville-185km road
- v. The Gbarnga to Mendicorma-281km road,
- vi. Ganta to Tapitta-100km road (World Bank is providing part financing already),
- vii. Financing Construction of Primary Highway from Tapitta to Fish Town-238km of road,
- viii. Rehabilitation of Road from Sanniquellie to Cote Ivoire (Danane)-74km road
- ix. Four Lane Road from ELWA Junction to Roberts International Airport -27km
- x. Medina to Robertsports-40.4km road
- xi. Brewerville to Bopolu-86km road

We are aware that every year, during the raining season, most of the roads in our country are impassable, communities get disconnected and the movement of goods and services hampered. As such, our people are subjected to extreme hardships.

To address this perennial embarrassing issue, upon our confirmation, we will immediately seek collaboration with the Armed Forces of Liberia (engineering division), concession companies, road construction contractors and other stakeholders to establish technical brigades which will be responsible to recondition and maintain all critical points, on the major highways, prone to deterioration, during the raining season.

Distinguished Senators, as stated earlier, it is our desire that during the forthcoming raining season, no vehicle will get stuck on the primary roads in our country. For this to be realized, funding must be provided to support our immediate plan of action. The pro-poor agenda of this administration will be meaningless if our infrastructure development programs are not adequately funded to redress the many challenges.

While Donor partners, bilateral institutions and friendly governments are providing assistance to our infrastructure program, we must muster the courage to also substantially invest in the public works sector.

It is reported that between 2007 and 2017 (the last 10 years) the Liberian Government along with its development partners including SIDA, USAID, EU, JICA, the World Bank and AfDB, have invested about \$1.4bn in support of the National Road Infrastructure Goals which include connecting all 15 county capitals to Monrovia with paved roads and the preparation of detail engineering designs as the basis to attract construction funding, household nationwide (rural and urban) access to all season roads has not improved beyond 35%, according to the infrastructure report from the NIC. Currently, of the nearly 5,000 KM of roads projected for paving throughout the length and breadth of Liberia, only 734km have been paved. We still do have thousands of kilometers of primary and secondary laterite roads, as well as, feeder and community roads that need urgent attention in our counties, cities, towns and communities.

Distinguished Senators, many a time, Legislators do have vested interests, and rightfully so, in the implementation of infrastructural projects in their constituencies. Experience tells me that occasionally Legislators get frustrated when their concerns or complaints about infrastructural development are left unattended in a timely manner. I submit to you today that as a former Legislator myself and a former Chairman of the Senate Committee on Public Works, I will be sensitive and responsive to the infrastructure concerns of your constituencies as expressed thru you and by you.

We shall create easy access to our community dwellers who bring their queries and concerns to the ministry for redress. Towards this end, we shall appoint two desk officers in the community services department of the ministry, exclusively dedicated to receiving and processing for prompt response, all queries and concerns from 1) Individual Legislators and or the Legislature and 2) from the communities.

I pledge to you today that, when confirmed, you will find in us a reliable partner for infrastructural development in Liberia. Thank you and God bless.